

"PAPER ROSES"

By RUBY M. AYRES

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(Continued From Preceding Issue) CHAPTER XVII

Like a great many more of her sex, Brenda Myers was inordinately curious.

There had not been much excitement in her life since that moment when the rivalry between Edmund Ferguson and Eustace Myers was settled once and for all by her marriage; and she was a woman who loved excitement.

It was odd how completely she had turned from her first attitude with regard to Rosalie with the discovery of the wedding ring. The mystery and romance had awakened her curiosity far more than her sympathies, and, as she told the doctor, she did not mean to rest until she had unearthed the true story.

It rather upset her calculation when she heard that Four Winds had suddenly awakened to life again and that Roderick Britton was expected home.

"I don't believe it," she said, flatly, when Myers told her. "Why, surely, he wouldn't dare come here if—"

She broke off, remembering she had not told him of her suspicions. "Wouldn't dare?" echoed the doctor, blankly. "What on earth do you mean? I think it's a good thing he is coming back, myself. I met him in London the other day, and it struck me that he'd improved considerably."

Brenda laughed rather disdainfully. She deliberately walked past Four Winds when she went down to the village that morning on her way to Bedmund.

The last time she had passed the old house all the blinds had been drawn, and the carriage gates closed. Now there was an air of cheerfulness everywhere; windows were open, and one could see lace curtains fluttering in the autumn breeze. One of the big gates was fastened back, and a small motor-car stood at the door of the big house.

Brenda felt disappointed. Rorie's appearance in the village so soon seemed to dispose very finally of her suspicions. She told herself that it was the last thing he would do, were he in any way responsible for that little wedding ring. It meant, read justifying all her ideas, which she accordingly proceeded to do as she walked along the country road.

Now her one frail clue had proved so extremely unlikely, she did not know where to search for another, and a vivid imagination had not helped her at all by the time she reached Mrs. Fowler's little cottage at Bedmund.

Rosalie, lying apathetically on her sofa by the fire, saw Brenda coming up the path, and a little pucker of weakness crossed her face. She did not like the doctor's wife. She instinctively guessed that there was some underlying reason for her continued, thinly-veiled cross-examination, and in her weak way she fiercely resented it.

But she tried to smile when Brenda entered the room. She said she was not in so much pain—that she had had quite a good night. As a matter of fact she had lain awake listening to every hour chime by the church clock away on the other side of the village; but it seemed less trouble to say what was obviously expected of her.

Brenda sat down beside the sofa and fastened her coat. She appealed to Mrs. Fowler in her sharp managing way as to whether it were true that Rosalie had had a good night.

Mrs. Fowler said it was quite true. She understood the girl better than either the doctor or his wife. She read aright the little pucker between the blue eyes.

"It's quite warm out," Mrs. Myers declared. "And this room is so stuffy. Don't you think we might have a window open?"

She did not wait for an answer; she opened one wide, letting the damp air blow thru.

Rosalie shivered a little, but she made no remark.

"Has the doctor been over today?" asked Brenda, briskly. "Not well, he is sure to come; but I know he is very busy. Four Winds is open again." She spoke as if there were

an epidemic up at the big house which engaged her husband's time.

Mrs. Fowler looked interested. "Indeed! Dear, dear, what a long time it seems since the old gentleman died."

"It's only three weeks," said Mrs. Myers, quickly. "But I must admit that I never thought Roderick Britton would come back here to live." She was watching Rosalie closely as she spoke. The girl was lying with her eyes closed, dark lips set in a pucker of soft cheeks; but if Mrs. Myers had expected some show of emotion she was disappointed. Perhaps the lips folded a little more closely, but that was all.

"When you're well enough, Rosalie," Brenda went on, "I'll take you for a drive past Four Winds. You really ought to see it; it's a lovely old place. Roderick Britton's wife will be a most fortunate woman."

Rosalie's eyes opened slowly. The faint color in her cheeks seemed suddenly drained, but Mrs. Myers was not looking at her now.

"His wife?" asked Mrs. Fowler, interestedly. "Is he going to be married, then?"

"Well—" Brenda hesitated. "I know there was someone in London he was very much infatuated with, but she threw him over, and got engaged to an American. But I saw in one of the papers that he was killed two days ago in a motor accident, so I dare say she'll make it up with Roderick again now."

"Surely Mr. Britton wouldn't allow himself to be whistled back like that!" said Mrs. Fowler contemptuously, but Brenda shrugged her shoulders.

"Men are so foolish where a woman is concerned!" she replied, importantly.

She rose, fastening her coat. She glanced at Rosalie, but it almost seemed as if the girl had not been listening. Her blue eyes were fixed with a sort of strained weariness on the remaining yellow leaves which shivered on the tall trees outside the window.

When Mrs. Myers spoke to her she started, as if she had been roused from sleep.

"Dr. Idler will be down on Friday, you know," Brenda said, with her rather old-fashioned air of importance. "I hope you realize what a fortunate girl you are to be able to have such excellent advice."

The words sounded patronizing, the probably they were only meant in kindness. A flush crept into Rosalie's cheeks, but she answered, patiently.

"Everyone is very kind."

Mrs. Fowler went to the door with her visitor, but when she came back to the little room the tears were running down Rosalie's face; her slender body shook with sobs.

"Oh my dear, what is the matter?" Mrs. Fowler knelt down by the sofa, her kind face full of tender sympathy.

Rosalie lifted her weak arms and clasped them around the good woman's neck.

"Oh! Oh, Fowler, if they would only let me alone—only let me die—it would be so much kinder to everybody—so much kinder. They don't know what they are doing," she sobbed, broken-heartedly.

Mrs. Myers was nearly home when she met Roderick Britton in his little car. He was driving slowly, and the big sheep-dog, Scott, was sitting up beside him with a great air of importance.

Roderick glanced at Mrs. Myers casually, and she treated him to a frigid bow, as if she considered herself infinitely his superior; but her dissatisfied heart contracted with envy as she looked at the dainty little car. How many times had she not tried to persuade Eustace to change the slow cob, and the stuffy brougham, as she was pleased to call it, for a motor!

Rorie acknowledged the bow hurriedly. He had not recognized the doctor's wife at first. He thought she was looking much older than he had remembered her. He swung out of the village and down the Bedmund road.

It gave him a curious feeling as he drove along the narrow lanes between the high hedges. He felt as if he were revisiting a spot he had known years and years ago. It seemed impossible that it was only three weeks since he parted from Rosalie that windy morning at the cross-roads.

His young face was grave and serious. He realized all in a moment that there were so many things he would like to know about the death of the girl who had been his wife for so short a time.

He would have given a great deal now to hear what it was she had said to Sherney before she died. He longed selfishly to know that it was some message of forgiveness for himself; but it was so unlikely that he would ever hear.

He wondered where the dragged circus had plodded to now—the patient elephants, and the stilted clown—gone out of his life forever, tramping on from village to village, with no hope of anything better, only ever-increasing shabbiness and weariness. Well, Rosalie was out of it, anyway. She had told him more than once how she hated the life; and he—what fine promises he had made her, what a golden future he had held out to her in his arrogance!

He was passing the cross-roads now, and the thin spire of Bedmund parish church was in sight above the trees.

A sudden desire to go there again seized upon him. With hasty impulse he stopped the car at the old lighthouse and jumped out.

Scott followed with alacrity, and stood wagging his tail, waiting for orders.

"Good dog; stay there."

Rorie went on up the little sloping churchyard and in at the open door. The damp depression of the church struck him afresh; a single red light burned before the altar; the same wheezy old verger was sorting prayer books in one of the pews.

Rorie looked round with rather wistful eyes. This was where he had been married; that was the rose window thru which a weak ray of sunshine had stolen insistively to look at them a moment before the sudden, sharp shower of rain had deluged the earth.

Less than three weeks ago—it seemed a year!

The verger had turned his head stiffly, hearing young Britton's step; the eyes of the two men met across the church. Roderick swung round hastily and went out.

Scott greeted him with a joyous bark; he had not moved from the spot where Rorie had left him, but now he sprang back into the seat by the wheel.

DOINGS OF THE DUFFS



FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS



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Star Seattle Story Book

WHEN A WOMAN TELLS

By RUTH AGNES ABELING

CHAPTER L—MRS. AMES SEES NEED FOR REFORM

"Are things quite all right around the house?" Mrs. Ames asked me. "Quite—so far as I know," I replied.

"You look as if you are not any too 'all right' yourself, my dear! You aren't troubled?" she questioned.

"No," But my voice was now convincing. Lila ran on a little about some new things she needed, and some rather surprising plans for her personal supervision of her household.

"You can all squish in somehow," he said, with delightful optimism. "And it's not far."

They arrived back at Four Winds laughing like schoolboys home for the holidays. Blunt was delighted; he loved company, and there never had been any in old Britton's time.

Halsam was one of the three men invited. Rorie had asked him on the spur of the moment—why, he hardly knew, except that he was amusing, and could tell a story without boring everyone to death.

"There were a great many more Canoe Indians than Klickitats, but they were less clever."

"And when their horse began to drop behind and they fired on the rider of the Klickitat horse, the Plainsmen rose up in a body and began to shoot."

"Off the Canoe Indians scurried, leaving everything, even the winning horse never stopped till he reached Upper Buck creek by a trail he knew and then he hid. For the rest of his life he was done with horse racing."

"I heard a good yarn about you the other night, Rorie—chap at the club. He said you were married—'hal hal' He leaned back in his chair, and chuckled."

But Rorie did not laugh. He went a little pale about the lips; his eyes were distressed; as if his troubled gaze it almost seemed as if, at the head of the table, in the empty chair, he could see Rosalie's little ghost, looking across at him with eyes that wistfully waited for his reply.

"Who said so?" he asked, with an effort; but Halsam was not to be drawn. "I promised not to tell," he declared.

(Continued Monday)

ADVENTURES OF THE TWINS

By Olive Roberts Burton



Pretty soon the fairyman and the twins were swimming after Tub Terrapin.

One day Nancy and Nick brought Tub Terrapin to Cap'n Pennywinkle. "He's ready to show us," they explained.

Cap'n Pennywinkle scratched his head. "Blow my soul! Show us?" he cried. "Show us what?"

"I thought you would forget what I told you," replied Tub stiffly, "but that doesn't alter matters. If you wish to come along I'll show you just why Mr. Fisherman doesn't like Spike Starfish."

Cap'n Pennywinkle slapped his knee and grinned. "That's right, Tubby, you're honest, aren't you? Just wait until I get Mack Mackler to mind the cross roads for me and I'll go at once."

Pretty soon the fairyman and the twins were swimming after Tub Terrapin to see why it was that Mr. Fisherman didn't like Spike Starfish. On they swam, on and on, until they came to the bay, not far from the place where the big net hung. Tubby led them to a seaweed grove where they could see but

could not be seen, right beside a lot of smooth sand where a number of oysters were peacefully sleeping.

"My! And Cap'n Pennywinkle, don't they take life easy? Nothing to do but eat and sleep, the lazy creatures!"

"Oh, but just wait and see!" Tub told him. "Just you wait and keep very quiet."

So they waited and kept quiet. Pretty soon, who should peer out of the weeds on the other side of the oyster bed but Spike Starfish. Spike had five eyes, one at the end of each point, but he couldn't see very well. But small! Oh, how he could smell! Uncle Tom's blood hounds weren't a circumstance to Spike. And what! Spike's mouth was right in the middle of him and he could taste all oysters.

Right after Spike came another starfish.

"It's his twin!" explained Tub. "When I broke him, two of him grew."

(To Be Continued)

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