

A Cruel Revenge

BY LAURA JEAN LIBBEY

Author of "A Broken Betrothal," "Parted at the Altar,"

"The Heiress of Cameron Hall," Etc., Etc.

(CONTINUED.)

"I would have rushed quickly but Maud coolly interposed. You shall not enter this house, Rosebud Arden," she cried.

Something like the old, pretty defiant spirit flamed up for an instant in Rosebud's sorely tried heart.

"I will go in, Maudy," she cried; "this is papa's house and mine." The supreme moment of Maud Arden's long-looked-for revenge had come at last.

"Your home, indeed!" sneered Maud. "Allow me to inform you the lawyer who has just left the house has drawn up a new will. You are cut off without so much as a cent, and your father has made me the heiress of The Willows. This is my home now, and you shall not enter its doors."

"Oh, Maudy, Maudy, what have I done?" cried her unhappy little sister. "See, I am kneeling—supplicating at your feet, Maudy. I don't care for The Willows, you may have it all. Oh, it is not money I want, but only to go to my poor dear papa. Let me kiss his cold lips just once, Maudy, only once!"

Rosebud's voice rose to piteous entreaty. The very force of her woe would have melted a heart of stone, but never Maud Arden's.

"Go back to your handsome lover," she sneered in all the ungovernable rage of jealousy. "Go back to Percy Fielding, and tell him you are disowned, and see if he will stoop to gather the withered Rosebud!"

Rosebud suddenly recoiled as if an adder had stung her.

"You thought no one knew who the handsome lover was whom you stole out at dead of night to meet. But know now that I suspected you, and I followed you; and when I saw my reckless, fickle, handsome lover clasp you in his arms, I swore to be revenged. I hated you—hated you with all the force of my fierce, southern nature. Remember my words, Rosebud Arden," she hissed. "I will make your life a very curse—this is but half my revenge!"

The door swung to with a heavy bang, shattering her out from even the sweet privilege of gazing upon her dead father's face or kissing the death-cold lips.

All the fierce anger he had showered upon her young head was instantly forgotten when she heard that he lay cold in death.

Turned away—a houseless, penniless wanderer. God pity her! She knew not which way to turn. The future a blank.

"Oh, what is there in earth or heaven to pray for now?" she cried out, in a storm of passionate woe, as she sprang to her feet, almost frantic with the sense of her loss. "All alone—nobody to love me—nothing to look forward to! Oh, was my sin in marrying Percy so great? Heaven has dealt me this awful misery!"

Like one in a dream she turned slowly from the home that had been hers, walking quickly down the broad path, away from all that life held dear.

"I must find Percy," she said to herself, confusedly. "Surely I can reach the station before the train starts." Once, on the brow of the hill, she paused and looked back. "Good-bye, papa," she sobbed—"good-bye, old home!"



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She remembered Maud's words—that Percy intended going either to New York or Boston.

In her pocket was a little blue plush purse, containing a hundred dollars or more, which her father had given to her scarcely a month ago, on her sixteenth birthday.

"How little I dreamed what use I should put these bright golden coins to!" she faltered, sobbingly, caressing the gold pieces tenderly.

At that moment her eyes rested upon a bit of faded yellow paper carefully stowed away in the bottom of the purse. She unfolded it carefully, and read the address upon it by the faint, glimmering light in the waiting room.

"Mrs. Edna Waldron,
New York."

She remembered how she had found that bit of paper years ago in the garret, and how she had taken it to her father, asking who Edna Waldron was. She never forgot the terrible look that came over his face as he tore it from her grasp, setting his heel upon it.

"Know, once for all, she is your only living relative, except myself, as far as I know, and your deadliest foe. Never mention her name in my presence again," he had said, striding excitedly from the room.

Rosebud had gathered up the fragments of paper, and for some unaccountable reason hid them carefully away.

Her heart gave a great throb as she read the name. Why not go to her—her only living relative in all the wide world?

"Would she despise me if I were to go to her and tell her poor papa is dead?" she wondered. "I can not believe she will refuse to forgive poor papa, no matter what bitter secret lay buried in their past. I will go to her," she pondered, "tell her of Percy—and—and—she will advise me."

Poor little lamb! she was bending her footsteps unwisely into the wolf's power; yet now, rising voice from heaven cried out to stay her steps.

The outgoing trains were crowded, there was only a half seat vacant at the rear end of the car. Rosebud stopped hesitatingly before it, then she glanced timidly at the young man who, with his satchel and traveling-rug, was its only occupant.

"Please, sir, may I sit down here?" murmured Rosebud, "all the other seats are occupied."

Paul Howard raised his handsome brown eyes from the journal he was perusing, to the pretty little creature standing before him. He was on his feet in an instant.

"Certainly, miss," he replied, bowing in his most fascinating manner. "I shall only be too pleased to accommodate you."

Little Rosebud sunk down on the seat like a frightened child, and Paul resumed his seat, glancing admiringly at the bewitching little pink-and-white face turned so resolutely from him.

He took in at a single glance how perfectly the pretty braided fawn-colored cloak fitted the petite figure, and how daintily the soft white plumes drooped over her flaxen curls.

"I must not stare too long at the bewitching picture," he said to himself. "Probably her father and mother and no end of sisters and cousins and aunts are watching us on all sides."

On rushed the train through the gray dawn of the incoming day. All that forenoon Paul noticed with intense surprise that none of the relatives of whom he stood in such dread approached her. Surely, he thought, that innocent child can not be traveling all alone. The puzzling thought was soon settled.

"Can you tell me, please, sir, how long it will be until I reach New York?" asked Rosebud, anxiously. "I thought I would get there by noon."

"We reach Philadelphia at noon, but this train does not get into New York until two o'clock; but surely you are not traveling alone, are you, miss?" asked Paul in amazement. "I imagined the elderly gentleman and lady a few seats back were your father and mother."

"I have no father and mother—they are both dead. I am an orphan and all alone. I have an aunt living somewhere in New York," she went on in her innocent childish frankness. "And I am going to try to find her."

A dark glitter stole into Paul Howard's eyes, and the strange smile on his lips, which the drooping moustache concealed, would have petrified Little Rosebud with horror had she seen it. His face wore an expression

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or deep concern as he turned toward her eagerly, saying:

"What is your aunt's name. Perhaps I may know her?"

Poor thoughtless little Rosebud was delighted. She hastily produced the faded slip of paper from her purse and handed it to him, and he read the name, "Mrs. Edna Waldron, New York."

"Is it possible!" he exclaimed, in well-feigned astonishment. "You are Mrs. Waldron's niece? Why, your aunt and I are the best of friends." Rosebud uttered a little, glad, thankful cry.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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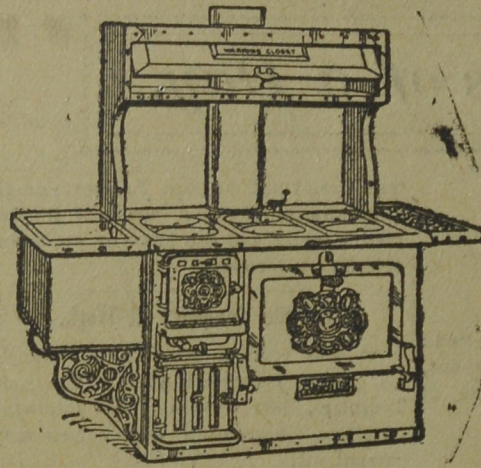
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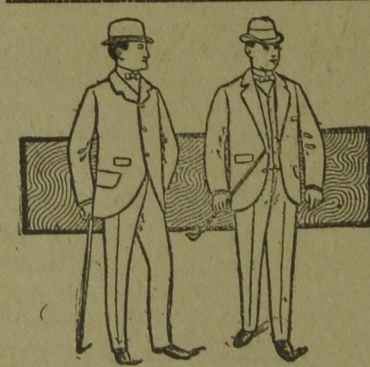
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