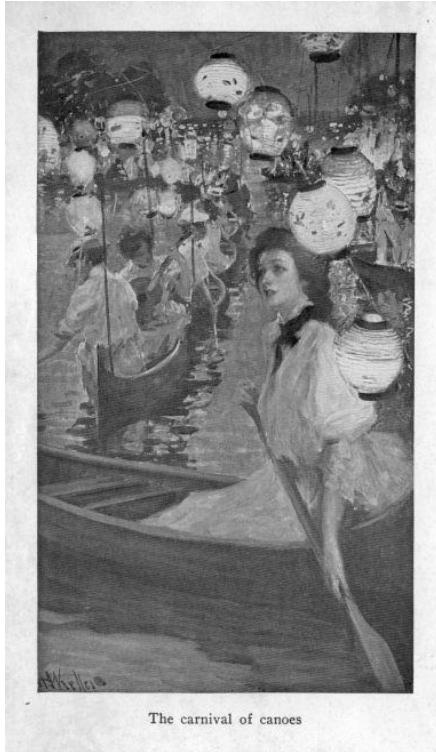


**ROSALIND AT RED
GATE**

By

MEREDITH NICHOLSON



The carnival of canoes

The carnival of canoes

TO MY MOTHER

*Rosalind: I thought thy heart had been
wounded with the claws of a
lion.*

*Orlando: Wounded it is, but with the
eyes of a lady.*

As You Like It.

*"Then dame Lioness said unto Sir
Gareth, Sir, I will lend you a ring; but I
would pray you as ye love me heartily
let me have it again when the
tournament is done, for that ring
increaseth my beauty much more than it
is of itself. And the virtue of my ring is
that that is green it will turn to red, and
that is red it will turn in likeness to
green, and that is blue it will turn to
likeness of white, and that is white, it
will turn in likeness to blue, and so it
will do of all manner of colours."*

Morte D'Arthur.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER

- I A Telegram from Paul Stoddard
- II Confidences
- III I Meet Mr. Reginald Gillespie
- IV I Explore Tippecanoe Creek
- V A Fight on a House-Boat
- VI A Sunday's Mixed Affairs
- VII A Broken Oar
- VIII A Lady of Shadows and Starlight
- IX The Lights on St. Agatha's Pier
- X The Flutter of a Handkerchief
- XI The Carnival of Canoes
- XII The Melancholy of Mr. Gillespie
- XIII The Gate of Dreams

- XIV Battle Orchard
- XVI Undertake a Commission
- XVI An Odd Affair at Red Gate
- XVII How the Night Ended
- XVIII The Lady of the White
Butterflies
- XIX Helen Takes Me to Task
- XX The Touch of Dishonor
- XXI A Blue Cloak and a Scarlet
- XXII Mr. Gillespie's Diversions
- XXIII The Rocket Signal
- XXIV "With My Hands"
- XXV Daybreak

ROSALIND AT RED GATE

CHAPTER I

A TELEGRAM FROM PAUL STODDARD

Up, up, my heart! Up, up, my heart,
This day was made for thee!
For soon the hawthorn spray shall part,
And thou a face shalt see
That comes, O heart, O foolish heart,
This way to gladden thee.
—*H. C. Bunner.*

Stoddard's telegram was brought to me on the Glenarm pier at four o'clock Tuesday afternoon, the fifth of June. I am thus explicit, for all the matters hereinafter described turn upon the receipt of Stoddard's message, which was, to be sure, harmless enough in itself, but, like many other scraps of paper that blow about the world, the forerunner of confusion and trouble.

My friend, Mr. John Glenarm, had gone abroad for the summer with his family and had turned over to me his house at Annandale that I might enjoy its seclusion and comfort while writing my book on *Russian Rivers*.

If John Glenarm had not taken his family abroad with him when he went to Turkey to give the sultan's engineers lessons in bridge building; if I had not accepted his kind offer of the house at Annandale for the summer; and if Paul Stoddard had not sent me that telegram, I should never have written this narrative. But such was the predestined way of it. I rose from the boat I was caulking, and, with the

waves from the receding steamer slapping the pier, read this message:

STAMFORD, Conn., June 5.

Meet Miss Patricia Holbrook Annandale station, five twenty Chicago express and conduct her to St. Agatha's school, where she is expected. She will explain difficulties. I have assured her of your sympathy and aid. Will join you later if necessary. Imperative engagements call me elsewhere.

STODDARD.

To say that I was angry when I read this message is to belittle the truth. I read and re-read it with growing heat. I had accepted Glenarm's offer of the house at Annandale because it promised peace, and now I was ordered by telegraph to meet a strange person of whom I had never heard, listen to her story, and tender my sympathy and aid. I glanced at my watch. It was already after four. "Delayed in transmission" was stamped across the telegraph form—I learned later that it had lain half the day in Annandale, New York—so that I was now face to face with the situation, and without opportunity to fling his orders back to Stoddard if I wanted to. Nor did I even know Stamford from Stamboul, and I am not yet clear in my mind—being an Irishman with rather vague notions of American geography—whether Connecticut is north or south of Massachusetts.

"Ijima!"

I called my Japanese boy from the boat-house, and he appeared, paint-brush in hand.

"Order the double trap, and tell them to hurry."

I reflected, as I picked up my coat and walked toward the house, that if any one but Paul Stoddard had sent me such a message I should most certainly have ignored it; but I knew him as a man who did not make demands or impose obligations lightly. As the founder and superior of the Protestant religious Order of the Brothers of Bethlehem he was, I knew, an exceedingly busy man. His religious house was in the Virginia mountains; but he spent much time in quiet, humble service in city slums, in lumber-camps, in the mines of Pennsylvania; and occasionally he appeared like a prophet from the wilderness in some great church of New York, and preached with a marvelous eloquence to wondering throngs.

The trap swung into the arched driveway and I bade the coachman make haste to the Annandale station. The handsome bays were soon trotting swiftly toward the village, while I drew on my gloves and considered the situation. A certain Miss Holbrook, of whose existence I had been utterly ignorant an hour before, was about to arrive at Annandale. A clergyman, whom I had not seen for two years, had telegraphed me from a town in Connecticut to meet this person, conduct her to St. Agatha's School—just closed for the summer, as I knew—and to volunteer my services in difficulties that were darkly indicated in a telegram of forty-five words. The sender of the message I knew to be a serious character, and a gentleman of distinguished social connections. The name of the lady signified nothing except that she was unmarried; and as Stoddard's acquaintance was among all sorts and conditions

of men I could assume nothing more than that the unknown had appealed to him as a priest and that he had sent her to Lake Annandale to shake off the burdens of the world in the conventual air of St. Agatha's. High-born Italian ladies, I knew, often retired to remote convents in the Italian hills for meditation or penance. Miss Holbrook's age I placed conservatively at twenty-nine; for no better reason, perhaps, than that I am thirty-two.

The blue arch of June does not encourage difficulties, doubts or presentiments; and with the wild rose abloom along the fences and with robins tossing their song across the highway I ceased to growl and found curiosity getting the better of my temper. Expectancy, after all, is the cheerfullest tonic of life, and when the time comes when I can see the whole of a day's programme from my breakfast-table I shall be ready for man's last adventure.

I smoothed my gloves and fumbled my tie as the bays trotted briskly along the lake shore. The Chicago express whistled for Annandale just as we gained the edge of the village. It paused a grudging moment and was gone before we reached the station. I jumped out and ran through the waiting-room to the platform, where the agent was gathering up the mail-bags, while an assistant loaded a truck with trunks. I glanced about, and the moment was an important one in my life. Standing quite alone beside several pieces of hand-baggage was a lady—unmistakably a lady—leaning lightly upon an umbrella, and holding under her arm a magazine. She was clad in brown, from bonnet to shoes; the umbrella and magazine cover were of like tint, and even the suitcase nearest her struck the same

note of color. There was no doubt whatever as to her identity; I did not hesitate a moment; the lady in brown was Miss Holbrook, and she was an old lady, a dear, bewitching old lady, and as I stepped toward her, her eyes brightened—they, too, were brown!—and she put out her brown-gloved hand with a gesture so frank and cordial that I was won at once.

"Mr. Donovan—Mr. Laurance Donovan—I am sure of it!"

"Miss Holbrook—I am equally confident!" I said. "I am sorry to be late, but Father Stoddard's message was delayed."

"You are kind to respond at all," she said, her wonderful eyes upon me; "but Father Stoddard said you would not fail me."

"He is a man of great faith! But I have a trap waiting. We can talk more comfortably at St. Agatha's."

"Yes; we are to go to the school. Father Stoddard kindly arranged it. It is quite secluded, he assured me."

"You will not be disappointed, Miss Holbrook, if seclusion is what you seek."

I picked up the brown bag and turned away, but she waited and glanced about. Her "we" had puzzled me; perhaps she had brought a maid, and I followed her glance toward the window of the telegraph office.

"Oh, Helen; my niece, Helen Holbrook, is with me. I wished to wire some instructions to my housekeeper at home. Father Stoddard may not have explained—that it is partly on Helen's account that I am coming here."

"No; he explained nothing—merely gave me my instructions," I laughed. "He gives orders in a most militant fashion."

In a moment I had been presented to the niece, and had noted that she was considerably above her aunt's height; that she was dark, with eyes that seemed quite black in certain lights, and that she bowed, as her aunt presented me, without offering her hand, and murmured my name in a voice musical, deep and full, and agreeable to hear.

She took their checks from her purse, and I called the porter and arranged for the transfer of their luggage to St. Agatha's. We were soon in the trap with the bays carrying us at a lively clip along the lake road. It was all perfectly new to them and they expressed their delight in the freshness of the young foliage; the billowing fields of ripening wheat, the wild rose, blackberry and elderberry filling the angles of the stake-and-rider fences, and the flashing waters of the lake that carried the eye to distant wooded shores. I turned in my seat by the driver to answer their questions.

"There's a summer resort somewhere on the lake; how far is that from the school?" asked the girl.

"That's Port Annandale. It's two or three miles from St. Agatha's," I replied. "On this side and all the way to the

school there are farms. The lake looks like an oval pond as we see it here, but there are several long arms that creep off into the woods, and there's another lake of considerable size to the north. Port Annandale lies yonder."

"Of course we shall see nothing of it," said the younger Miss Holbrook with finality.

I sought in vain for any resemblance between the two women; they were utterly unlike. The little brown lady was interested and responsive enough; she turned toward her niece with undisguised affection as we talked, but I caught several times a look of unhappiness in her face, and the brow that Time had not touched gathered in lines of anxiety and care. The girl's manner toward her aunt was wholly kind and sympathetic.

"I'm sure it will be delightful here, Aunt Pat. Wild roses and blue water! I'm quite in love with the pretty lake already."

This was my first introduction to the diminutive of Patricia, and it seemed very fitting, and as delightful as the dear little woman herself. She must have caught my smile as the niece so addressed her for the first time and she smiled back at me in her charming fashion.

"You are an Irishman, Mr. Donovan, and Pat must sound natural."

"Oh, all who love Aunt Patricia call her Aunt Pat!" exclaimed the girl.

"Then Miss Holbrook undoubtedly hears it often," said I, and was at once sorry for my bit of blarney, for the tears shone suddenly in the dear brown eyes, and the niece recurred to the summer landscape as a topic, and talked of the Glenarm place, whose stone wall we were now passing, until we drove into the grounds of St. Agatha's and up to the main entrance of the school, where a Sister in the brown garb of her order stood waiting.

I first introduced myself to Sister Margaret, who was in charge, and then presented the two ladies who were to be her guests. It was disclosed that Sister Theresa, the head of the school, had wired instructions from York Harbor, where she was spending the summer, touching Miss Holbrook's reception, and her own rooms were at the disposal of the guests. St. Agatha's is, as all who are attentive to such matters know, a famous girls' school founded by Sister Theresa, and one felt its quality in the appointments of the pretty, cool parlor where we were received. Sister Margaret said just the right thing to every one, and I was glad to find her so capable a person, fully able to care for these exiles without aid from my side of the wall. She was a tall, fair young woman, with a cheerful countenance, and her merry eyes seemed always to be laughing at one from the depths of her brown hood. Pleasantly hospitable, she rang for a maid.

"Helen, if you will see our things disposed of I will detain Mr. Donovan a few minutes," said Miss Holbrook.

"Or I can come again in an hour—I am your near neighbor," I remarked, thinking she might wish to rest from her journey.

"I am quite ready," she replied, and I bowed to Helen Holbrook and to Sister Margaret, who went out, followed by the maid. Miss Pat—you will pardon me if I begin at once to call her by this name, but it fits her so capitally, it is so much a part of her, that I can not resist—Miss Pat put off her bonnet without fuss, placed it on the table and sat down in a window-seat whence the nearer shore of the lake was visible across the strip of smooth lawn.

"Father Stoddard thought it best that I should explain the necessity that brings us here," she began; "but the place is so quiet that it seems absurd to think that our troubles could follow us."

I bowed. The idea of this little woman's being driven into exile by any sort of trouble seemed preposterous. She drew off her gloves and leaned back comfortably against the bright pillows of the window-seat. "Watch the hands of the guest in the tent," runs the Arabian proverb. Miss Pat's hands seemed to steal appealingly out of her snowy cuffs; there was no age in them. The breeding showed there as truly as in her eyes and face. On the third finger of her left hand she wore a singularly fine emerald, set in an oddly carved ring of Roman gold.

"Will you please close the door?" she said, and when I came back to the window she began at once.

"If it is not pleasant, as you must understand, to explain to a stranger an intimate and painful family trouble. But Father Stoddard advised me to be quite frank with you."

"That is the best way, if there is a possibility that I may be of service," I said in the gentlest tone I could command. "But tell me no more than you wish. I am wholly at your service without explanations."

"It is in reference to my brother; he has caused me a great deal of trouble. When my father died nearly ten years ago—he lived to a great age—he left a considerable estate, a large fortune. A part of it was divided at once among my two brothers and myself. The remainder, amounting to one million dollars, was left to me, with the stipulation that I was to make a further division between my brothers at the end of ten years, or at my discretion. I was older than my brothers, much older, and my father left me with this responsibility, not knowing what it would lead to. Henry and Arthur succeeded to my father's business, the banking firm of Holbrook Brothers, in New York. The bank continued to prosper for a time; then it collapsed suddenly. The debts were all paid, but Arthur disappeared—there were unpleasant rumors—"

She paused a moment, and looked out of the window toward the lake, and I saw her clasped hands tighten; but she went on bravely.

"That was seven years ago. Since then Henry has insisted on the final division of the property. My father had a high sense of honor and he stipulated that if either of his

sons should be guilty of any dishonorable act he should forfeit his half of the million dollars. Henry insists that Arthur has forfeited his rights and that the amount withheld should be paid to him now; but his conduct has been such that I feel I should serve him ill to pay him so large a sum of money. Moreover, I owe something to his daughter—to Helen. Owing to her father's reckless life I have had her make her home with me for several years. She is a noble girl, and very beautiful—you must have seen, Mr. Donovan, that she is an unusually beautiful girl."

"Yes," I assented.

"And better than that," she said with feeling, "she is a very lovely character."

I nodded, touched to see how completely Helen Holbrook filled and satisfied her aunt's life. Miss Pat continued her story.

"My brother first sought to frighten me into a settlement by menacing my own peace; and now he includes Helen in his animosity. My house at Stamford was set on fire a month ago; then thieves entered it and I was obliged to leave. We arranged to go abroad, but when we got to the steamer we found Henry waiting with a threat to follow us if I did not accede to his demands. It was Father Stoddard who suggested this place, and we came by a circuitous route, pausing here and there to see whether we were followed. We were in the Adirondacks for a week, then we went into Canada, crossed the lake to Cleveland

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