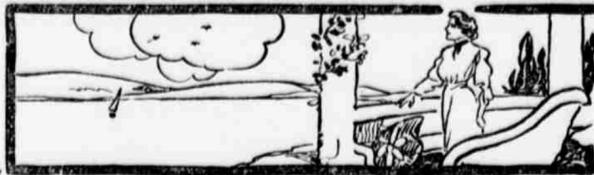


# ROSALIND AT RED GATE

BY  
**MEREDITH  
NICHOLSON**  
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## SYNOPSIS

Miss Patricia Holbrook and Miss Helen Holbrook, her niece, were entrusted to the care of Laurence Donovan, a writer, summering near Port Annandale. Miss Patricia confided to Donovan that she feared her brother Henry, who, ruined by a bank failure, had constantly threatened her for money, from his father's will, of which Miss Patricia was guardian. They came to Port Annandale to escape Henry. Donovan sympathized with the two women. He learned of Miss Helen's annoying suitor, Donovan discovered and captured an intruder, who proved to be Reginald Gillespie, suitor for the hand of Miss Helen Holbrook. Gillespie disappeared the following morning. A rough sailor appeared and was ordered away. Donovan saw Miss Holbrook and her father meet on friendly terms. Donovan fought an Italian assassin. He met the man he supposed was Holbrook, but who said he was Hartridge, a canoe-maker.

## CHAPTER V.—Continued.

He spoke the name caressingly, his manner and tone implying that there could be no debating the subject. I was prepared for evasion, but not for this cool denial of his identity.

"But this afternoon, Mr. Holbrook, I chanced to follow the creek to this point and I saw—"

"You probably saw that houseboat down there, that is my shop. As I tell you, I am a maker of canoes. They have, I hope, some reputation—honest hand-work; and my output is limited. I shall be deeply chagrined if you have never heard of the Hartridge canoe."

He shook his head in mock grief, walked to a cabarette and took up a pipe and filled it. He was carrying off the situation well; but his coolness angered me.

"Mr. Hartridge, I am sorry that I must believe that heretofore you have been known as Holbrook. The fact was clenched for me this afternoon, quite late, as I stood in the path below there. I heard quite distinctly a young woman call you father."

"So? Then you're an eavesdropper as well as a trespasser!"—and the man laughed.

"We will admit that I am both," I flared, angrily.

"You are considerate, Mr. Donovan!"

"The young woman who called you father and whom you answered from the deck of the houseboat is a person I know."

"The devil!"

He calmly puffed his pipe, holding the bowl in his fingers, his idle hand thrust into his trousers pocket.

"It was Miss Helen Holbrook that I saw here, Mr. Hartridge."

He started, then recovered himself and peered into the pipe bowl for a second; then looked at me with an amused smile on his face.

"You certainly have a wonderful imagination. The person you saw, if you saw any one on your visit to these premises to-day, was my daughter, Rosalind Hartridge. Where do you think you knew her, Mr. Donovan?"

"I saw her this morning at St. Agatha's school. I not only say her, but I talked with her, and I am neither deaf nor blind."

He pursed his lips and studied me, with his head slightly tilted to one side, in a cool fashion that I did not like.

"Father an odd place to have met this Miss—what name, did you say?"—Miss Helen Holbrook;—a closed schoolhouse, and that sort of thing."

"You may ease your mind on that point; she was with your sister, her aunt, Mr. Holbrook; and I want you to understand that your following Miss Patricia Holbrook here is infamous and that I have no other business but to protect her from you."

He bent his eyes upon me gravely and nodded several times.

"Mr. Donovan," he began, "I repeat that I am not Henry Holbrook, and my daughter—is my daughter, and not your Miss Helen Holbrook. Moreover, if you will go to Tippecanoe or to Annandale and ask about me you will learn that I have been a resident of this community, working at my trade, that of a canoe-maker. That shop down there by the creek and this house, I built myself."

"But the girl—"

"Was not Helen Holbrook, but my daughter, Rosalind Hartridge. She has been away at school, and came home only a week ago. You are clearly mistaken; and if you will call, as you undoubtedly will, on your Miss Holbrook at St. Agatha's in the morning, you will undoubtedly find your young lady there quite safely in charge of—what was the name, Miss Patricia Holbrook?—in whose behalf you take so praiseworthy an interest."

He was treating me quite as though I were a stupid schoolboy, but I rallied sufficiently to demand:

"If you are so peaceable and only a boatmaker here, will you tell me why you have enemies who are so anxious to kill you? I imagine that murder isn't common on the quiet shores of this little creek, and that an Italian sailor is not employed to kill men who have not a past of some sort behind them."

His brows knit and the jaw under his short beard tightened. Then he smiled and threw his pipe on the cabarette.

"I have only your word for it that there's an Italian in the wood-pile. I have friends among the country folk here and in the lake villages who can vouch for me. As I am not in the



I Brought My Horse to a Walk as I Nearing the Cottage.

least interested in your affairs I shall not trouble you for your credentials; but as the hour is late and I hope I have satisfied you that we have no acquaintances in common, I will bid you good night. If you care for a boat to carry you home—"

"Thank you, no!" I jerked.

He bowed with slightly exaggerated courtesy, walked to the door and threw it open. He asked where I had left my horse, wished me a pleasant ride home, and was striding up the highway in no agreeable frame of mind before I quite realized that after narrowly escaping death on his houseboat at the hands of his enemies, Henry Holbrook had not only sent me away as ignorant as I had come, but had added considerably to my perplexities.

## CHAPTER VI.

### A Sunday's Mixed Affairs.

The faithful Ujima opened the door of Glenarm House, and after I had swallowed the supper he always had ready for me when I kept late hours, I established myself in comfort on the terrace and studied the affairs of the house of Holbrook until the robins rang up the dawn. On their hint I went to bed and slept until Ujima came in at ten o'clock with my coffee. An old hymn chimed by the chapel bells reminded me that it was Sunday. Services were held during the summer, so the house servants informed me, for the benefit of the cottagers at Port Annandale; and walking to our pier I soon saw a flotilla of launches and canoes steering for St. Agatha's. I entered the school grounds by the Glenarm gate and watched several smart traps approach by the lake road, depositing other devout folk at the chapel.

The sight of bright parasols and modish gowns, the semi-urban Sunday that had fallen in this quiet corner of the world, as though out of the bright blue above, made all the more unreal my experiences of the night. And just then the door of the main hall of St. Agatha's opened and forth came Miss Pat, Helen Holbrook and Sister Margaret and walked toward the chapel.

It was Helen who greeted me first. "Aunt Pat can't withstand the temptations of a day like this. We're chagrined to think we never knew this part of the world before!"

"I'm sure there is no danger," said Miss Pat, smiling at her own timidity as she gave me her hand. I thought that she wished to speak to me alone, but Helen lingered at her side, and it was she who asked the question that was on her aunt's lips.

"We are undiscovered? You have heard nothing, Mr. Donovan?"

"Nothing, Miss Holbrook," I said; and I turned away from Miss Pat—whose eyes made lying difficult—to Helen, who met my gaze with charming candor.

And I took account of the girl anew as I walked between her and Miss Pat, through a trellised lane that alternated crimson ramblers and purple clematis, to the chapel, Sister Margaret's brown-robed figure preceding us. The open sky, the fresh airs of morning, the bird-song and the smell of verdurous earth in themselves gave Sabbath benediction. I challenged all my senses as I heard Helen's deep voice running on in light banter with her aunt. It was not possible that I had seen her through the dusk only the day before, traitorously meeting

her father, the foe of this dear old lady who walked beside me. It was an impossible thing; the thought was unchivalrous and unworthy of any man calling himself gentleman. No one so wholly beautiful, no one with her voice, her steady tranquil eyes, could, I argued, do ill. And yet I had seen and heard her; I might have touched her as she crossed my path and ran down to the houseboat!

She wore to-day a white and green gown and trailed a green parasol in a white-gloved hand. Her small round hat with its sharply upturned brim imparted a new frankness to her face. Several times she looked at me quickly—she was almost my own height—and there was no questioning the perfect honesty of her splendid eyes.

"We hoped you might drop in yesterday afternoon," she said, and my ears were at once alert.

"Yes," laughed Miss Pat, "we were—"

"We were playing chess, and almost came to blows!" said Helen. "We played from tea to dinner, and Sister Margaret really had to come and tear us away from our game."

I had now learned, as though by her own intention, that had been at St. Agatha's, playing a harmless game with her aunt, at the very moment that I had seen her at the canoe-maker's. And even more conclusive was the fact that she had made this statement before her aunt, and that Miss Pat had acquiesced in it.

We had reached the church door, and I had really intended entering with them; but now I was in no frame of mind for church; I murmured an excuse about having letters to write.

"But this afternoon we shall go for a ride or a sail, which shall it be, Miss Holbrook?" I said, turning to Miss Pat in the church porch.

She exchanged glances with Helen before replying.

"As you please, Mr. Donovan. It might be that we should be safer on the water."

I was relieved. On the lake there was much less chance of her being observed by Henry Holbrook than in the highways about Annandale. It was, to be sure, a question whether the man I had encountered at the canoe-maker's was really her brother; that question was still to be settled. The presence of Gillespie I had forgotten utterly; but he was, at any rate, the least important figure in the little drama unfolding before me.

"I shall come to your pier with the launch at five o'clock," I said, and with thanks murmuring in my ears I turned away, went home and called for my horse.

I repeated my journey of the night before, making daylight acquaintance with the highway. I brought my horse to a walk as I neared the canoe-maker's cottage, and I read his sign and the lettering on his mail box and satisfied myself that the name Hartridge was indisputably set forth on both. There was no one in sight; perhaps the adventure and warning of the night had caused Holbrook to leave; but at any rate I was bent upon ascertaining about him in Tippecanoe village.

This place, lying two miles beyond the canoe-maker's, I found to be a sleepy hamlet of perhaps 50 cottages, a country store, a post-office, and a blacksmith shop. There was a water trough in front of the store, and I dismounted to give my horse a drink while I went to the cottage behind the closed store to seek the shopkeeper.

I found him in a garden under an apple tree reading a newspaper. He was an old fellow in spectacles, and, assuming that I was an idler from the summer colony, he greeted me courteously. I questioned him as to the character of the winters in this region, spoke of the employments of the village folk, then mentioned the canoe-maker.

"Yes; he works the year round down there on the Tippecanoe. He sells his canoes all over the country—the Hartridge, that's his name. You must have seen his sign there by the cedar hedge. They say he gets big prices for his canoes."

"I suppose he's a native in these parts?" I ventured.

"No; but he's been here a good while. I guess nobody knows where he comes from—I guess he likes it."

"He's an industrious man, is he?"

"Oh, he's a steady worker; but he's a queer kind, too. Now, he never votes and he never goes to church; and for the sake of the argument, neither do I"—and the old fellow winked prodigiously. "He's a mighty odd man; but I can't say that that's against him. But he's quiet and peaceable, and now his daughter—"

"Oh, he has a daughter?"

"Yes; and that's all he has, too; and they never have any visitors. The daughter just come home the other day, and we ain't hardly seen her yet. She's been away at school."

"I suppose Mr. Hartridge is absent sometimes; he doesn't live down there all the time, does he?"

"I can't say that I could prove it; sometimes I don't see him for a month or more; but his business is his own, stranger," he concluded, pointedly.

"You think that if Mr. Hartridge had a visitor you'd know it?" I persisted, though the shopkeeper grew less amiable.

"Well, now, I might; and again I mightn't. Mr. Hartridge is a queer man. I don't see him every day, and particularly in the winter I don't keep track of him."

With a little leading the storekeeper described Hartridge for me, and his description tallied exactly with the man who had caught me on the canoe-maker's premises the night before. And yet, when I had thanked the storekeeper and ridden on through the village, I was as much befuddled as ever. There was something decidedly incongruous in the idea that a man who was, by all superficial signs, at least a gentleman, should be established in the business of making canoes by the side of a lonely creek in this odd corner of the world. From the storekeeper's account, Hartridge might be absent from his retreat for long periods; if he were Henry Holbrook and wished to annoy his sister, it was not so far from this lonely creek to the Connecticut town where Miss Pat lived. Again, as to the daughter, just home from school and not yet familiar to the eyes of the village, she might easily enough be an invention to hide the visits of Helen Holbrook. I found myself trying to account for the fact that, by some means short of the miraculous, Helen Holbrook had played chess with Miss Pat at St. Agatha's at the very hour I had seen her with her father on the Tippecanoe. And then I was baffled again as I remembered that Paul Stoddard had sent the two women to St. Agatha's, and that their destination could not have been chosen by Helen Holbrook.

My thoughts wandered into many blind alleys as I rode on. I was thoroughly disgusted with myself at finding the loose ends of the Holbrooks' affairs multiplying so rapidly. The sun of noon shone hot overhead, and I turned my horse into a road that led homeward by the eastern shore of the lake. As I approached a little country church at the crown of a long hill I saw a crowd gathered in the highway and reined my horse to see what had happened. The congregation of farmers and their families had just been dismissed; and they were pressing about a young man who stood in the center of an excited throng. Drawing closer, I was amazed to find my friend Gillespie the center of attention.

"But, my dear sir," cried a tall, bearded man whom I took to be the minister of this wayside flock, "you must at least give us the privilege of thanking you! You cannot know what this means to us, a gift so magnificent—so far beyond our dreams."

Whereat Gillespie looked bored, shook his head, and tried to force his way through the encircling rustles. He was clad in a Norfolk jacket and knickerbockers of fantastic plaid, with a cap to match.

A young farmer, noting my curiosity and heavy with great news, whispered to me:

"That boy in short pants put a \$1,000 bill in the collection basket. All in one bill! They thought it was a mistake, but he told our preacher it was a free gift."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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Not Even Sandy. Wilford was sitting on his father's knee watching his mother arranging her hair.

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