

ROSA'S CHRISTMAS DINNER

From New York Weekly

Grandmother Gray, with her white full-bordered cap, muslin kerchief, and faded black gown, looked as she was, like a grand old woman of the olden time, and the dim eyes, that had seen their full eighty odd years, brightened in the genial warmth and good cheer to which they had long been strangers and her tongue, like most of the others, was loosened to speak words of wisdom as she talked of that old-time.

Every one, in fact, felt better, and happier, and more able to endure the winter's coming struggle with poverty and destitution by the renewed at a gift and cheer imparted not only by the nice dinner, but also by the pleasant social intercourse they enjoyed at Rosa Dora's Christmas party.

But the about sister's day drew to its close. Nellie Gray led her aged grandmother up to her bedroom attic and helped her to bed. Mrs. West went home with her delighted but sleepy youngsters, with their hands full of nuts and candy, and Uncle Ben and Carrie Somers alone remained to spend the evening with Rosa Dora.

The table had long been cleared away. The dishes were now washed the room set in order, and the lamp lighted, and then the two girls sat down to talk with and sing for Uncle Ben.

"How was it, uncle, that you got the hurt that makes you so lame? I don't know as I ever heard," said Rosa.

"Oh, it was done the last time I was shipwrecked off the coast of Brazil, five years ago last September."

"How was it done?" she asked, faintly, with a start and a shudder she could not repress, for it was just five years in September since, Donald, her dear and only brother, and Charlie Graham, her dearest friend, went down on that same treacherous coast.

"This is the way it was done," he said. "We were overtaken by a frightful storm. Our masts were snapped off like pop-stems in the gale, and came down with our torn sails and broken cordage, upon the deck; and I, who was climbing the rigging at the time, was smashed beneath the ruins. I was stunned, fearfully bruised, and had my leg broken at the knee, though I did not know it until some time afterward. The next I knew the storm had spent its fury, and I was alone on the wreck in fearful pain and peril.

"The ship was careered, and I was kept from falling off into the sea only by being tangled among the rigging. Pretty soon, however, a couple of sailor lads, who, with a good many others, had been swamped in one of the boats, came swimming back to the wreck, and crawled up to where I was lying. The poor fellows were half-drowned and completely exhausted but they were thankful enough to get back to the wreck. As soon as they were a little rested, they fixed me in a more comfortable position, and bound up my leg as well as they could with strips of wood and d strips cut from the sails and their own scanty garments.

"We suffered dreadfully from thirst and hunger, and from the tropical sun in the day time, and the chill and duff by night; but the third day, thank Heaven, we were discovered, and taken off in a starving condition by an outward-bound vessel, and carried into Rio Janeiro.

"They took me to a sailors' hospital, where the lady, Heaven bless 'em! took care of me till they got a chance to ship for Australia. When I got well enough the American Consul paid my passage home, and lucky enough was I to find a little shot in the locker, in the shape of a leg or from a maiden aunt, who had loved me once as my own boy, and little thought I should become such an old hunk at last."

"And now comes the strangest thing of all. I never expected it when we parted, that I should ever set eyes on them two lads again; but this very morning, as I was down to the wharves as usual, looking all around, a fine young fellow stepped up in front of me, and for a full minute looked steadily in my weather-beaten face, as if he would look me through. Then a smile broke like sunshine over his own face, as he put out his hand exclaiming:

"Is it—can it be dear Uncle Ben, our quondam shipmate, companion and friend?"

"'Tis Uncle Ben, sure enough," I replied; "but who the duse you are as more than I can fathom."

"Then he laughed, and the young fellow that was with him laughed, and as sure as you live, they turned out to be the very chaps who swam back to the wreck and saved my life five years ago. They've changed so much and grown so much that I don't believe their own mothers would know 'em, if they've got any; and they told me they'd been looking all around in vain to find their friends or anybody they knew. That made 'em glad to see old Uncle Ben, I suppose, and they're coming up to see me forthwith. I hope they won't come up to-night, though; but if they do, my landlady will tell 'em to go away and wait till morning, for Uncle Ben's gone to visit with the ladies."

The old man laughed merrily at the idea, and Carrie Somers laughed, but Rosa was grave, thinking of a strange possibility, stirred by a sudden wild hope, that it could not be possible would ever be realized. At the moment heavy steps were heard ascending the stairs. They entered the dimly lighted passage, and stopped before Rosa Dora's door. There was a boy's voice exclaiming:

"Here, sir, is the place," and then there was a ringing knock.

Rosa went to the door and opened it with trembling fingers. A tall, sharply-featured man, bearded, and bronzed by the Southern sun, stood before her, while another, whom she did not see, stood behind him in the entry.

"Good evening, sir; will you come?" she said, in tremulous tones, sure, from the looks, that she must be one of Uncle Ben's visitors.

"No, madam," he returned, politely. "I called to see if Mr. Ben—"

He stopped short there, gazing with startled eyes into Rosa's beautiful face, framed, as it was, in a wealth of golden curls. Then he stepped forward, and impulsively extended both hands, as he exclaimed in thrilling tones:

"Rosa! Rosa Dora! Do you not know me?—your long-lost brother, Donald!"

For a moment Rosa looked up into his face with a startled, searching gaze, then she impulsively threw herself into his arms, as she cried in joyful tones:

"Oh, it is, it is my Donald, come back to me, as from the dead!"

He pressed her to his heart, and his tears mingled with hers as she sobbed passionately for very joy, until he calmed as he raised her flushed face from his bosom:

"Have you no word of welcome for another friend of your youth? I say, my dear Rosa? Charlie Graham is here waiting to be recognized."

Rosa raised herself in an instant, just as Charlie, at a signal from Donald, entered the little room. She looked up into his handsome, manly face for an instant, and then the bright color flushed over her own. To the eyes of youthful affection there was no mistaking that noble brow, wavy brown hair, and beautiful black eyes, for any others, even though the smooth chin was bearded now, and the slender form far taller, broader and manlier.

It was Charlie Graham, and no mistake; and she could not refuse the loving embrace and kiss which he sealed their reunion.

The meeting was indeed a joyful one; the only drawback being the news of the dear father's death, which came to both young men like a heavy blow.

They were duly introduced to pretty Carrie Somers, and they rejoiced to meet Uncle Ben once more, and talk over the events of the unfortunate voyage they had made together. They had been to the gold mines of Australia, it seemed—been unsuccessful, and suffered a grand deal for two whole years; but had eventually made handsome fortunes.

They had written a good many times, and at last sent money, but from many causes none of their letters or messages had ever reached Rosa or her poor father, who died in the belief of his son's death, and with the hope of meeting him and his lot wife in Heaven.

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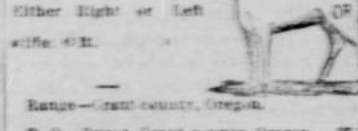
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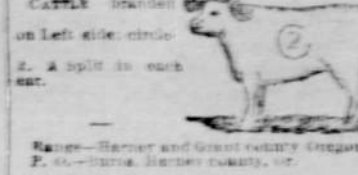
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