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ROXIE.

From People's Home Journal.

CHAPTER X.

Roxie sat silently pulling up the long, green fringes of the squawvine that thrust its red berries through the brown, sweet-smelling pine needles at her feet. I doubt if she didn't wish she had accepted Mrs Trevor's offer, and gone to Poohayan Mills, just then. She was miserable enough to have thrown herself into the mill brook, and there made an end of the whole matter.

Presently an approaching step awoke Roxie from her meditation. A human shadow fell across the pine roots on which she sat. She looked up and saw Philip Trevor standing by her side.

On his face was an odd, pale determination altogether new to it. He stretched out his hand.

"You need not be ashamed to take it," he said, quietly, "for all is over, Roxie."

"What is over?" said she. "My struggle concerning you. I have told Miss Clay, and she has broken with me—Heaven bless her! As for my mother she must like the best of the world, yield to the inevitable. I will not fight against my own heart longer! I cannot! I am worn out! For days and weeks I have been in purgatory. I cannot live without you. Pride, honor, my plighted word—I have given down before you. Roxie, I love you with all my heart. I ask you to be my wife."

Straightforward and manly, was he not? The Trevor blood improves with time. I think Roxie arose from the pine knots, white with astonishment, and scarcely able to believe her ears.

"This is a strange jest for you to make," said she, bitterly.

He looked her full in her lovely face.

"It is no jest, but heavens honest truth, Roxie! I love you! I will be on you too glad to marry you tomorrow—today—as soon as you will give yourself to me."

He stretched out his arms to her with a flush on his cheek and his sleepy eyes all aglow; and just then a bit of dry undergrowth near the water cracked sharply. Something stirred in the wood; not a rabbit,

nor partridge, nor squirrel—something flashed out from behind a rough pine-hole at Philip Trevor's back—a dark, cruel face—the glittering muzzle of a gun pointed straight at the young squire's breast. Roxie, turning quickly, saw the fowl, jealous image, with black murder written plainly on the face of it; and, with a scream that rung far and wide through the wood, she flung herself before Philip Trevor, crying out, wildly:

"Fly, Philip! He will kill you!" And the next moment there was a deafening report, a puff of smoke curling through the woods, and, with the blood streaming from the flower-like face which had bewitched Squire Trevor into forgetting pride and name and station, Roxie fell like dead to the earth.

The saw-mill was near at hand, and Trevor snatched her up and carried her there. A surgeon was sent for in hot haste, and in half an hour the whole town knew that Roxie Blake had been shot by a jealous lover in Millbrook Wood, and that her wonderful beauty was well nigh ruined forever.

They never found Sandy. Philip Trevor offered a thousand dollars reward for any clue that would lead to his apprehension, but without result. Nobody in Plympton ever saw his dark, ugly face more. Of course the scoundrel didn't intend to harm Roxie—he loved her too well for that. She received the shot meant for Trevor—that was all.

At first the surgeon thought she would die; but she was young, and had a good constitution, and she pulled through the danger, and two months after Philip Trevor married her. I never would have believed one of his blood capable of such fidelity.

But in spite of his mother—in spite of all the Plympton folks who declared her good looks gone forever sick and scarred as she was—he married her and carried her away to some country over the sea, and I didn't see her again for two long years.

After all, Mrs. Joe's teacup told a true story. Yesterday I met Roxie's carriage rolling across the bridge, and she sat among its satin cushions, dressed in a costume straight from Worth's, and looking as handsome as a princess. To be sure, the mark of Sandy Blake's bullet is still to be seen on her face, but it doesn't seem to hurt her beauty. I hear the squire is very proud of that scar, because it is the price she paid for his life, he says.

Well, I always knew that Roxie had brains. She has put on all the airs and graces of a born lady. To look at her now, no one would dream that she ever wore a calico dress or carried a pail of water in her life. She had the good sense, you see, to fit herself for her position. Her husband adores her; and since the birth of that baby boy, which a white-capped Swiss nurse parades through Plympton's streets every fine day, even his haughty old mother is reconciled to the match.

Of course Roxie has made the fortune of the Blake family. You can't touch one of them now with a ten-foot pole. They live in that big house beyond the bridge, and old Joe is owner of the saw-mill where he once worked as a common hand. Some people are born to good luck in this world, and no mistake. Gracious! here's Roxie's carriage coming over the bridge—high stepping horses, livered driver, and all. Run to the window—do, and take a good look at her as she goes by.

THE END.

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