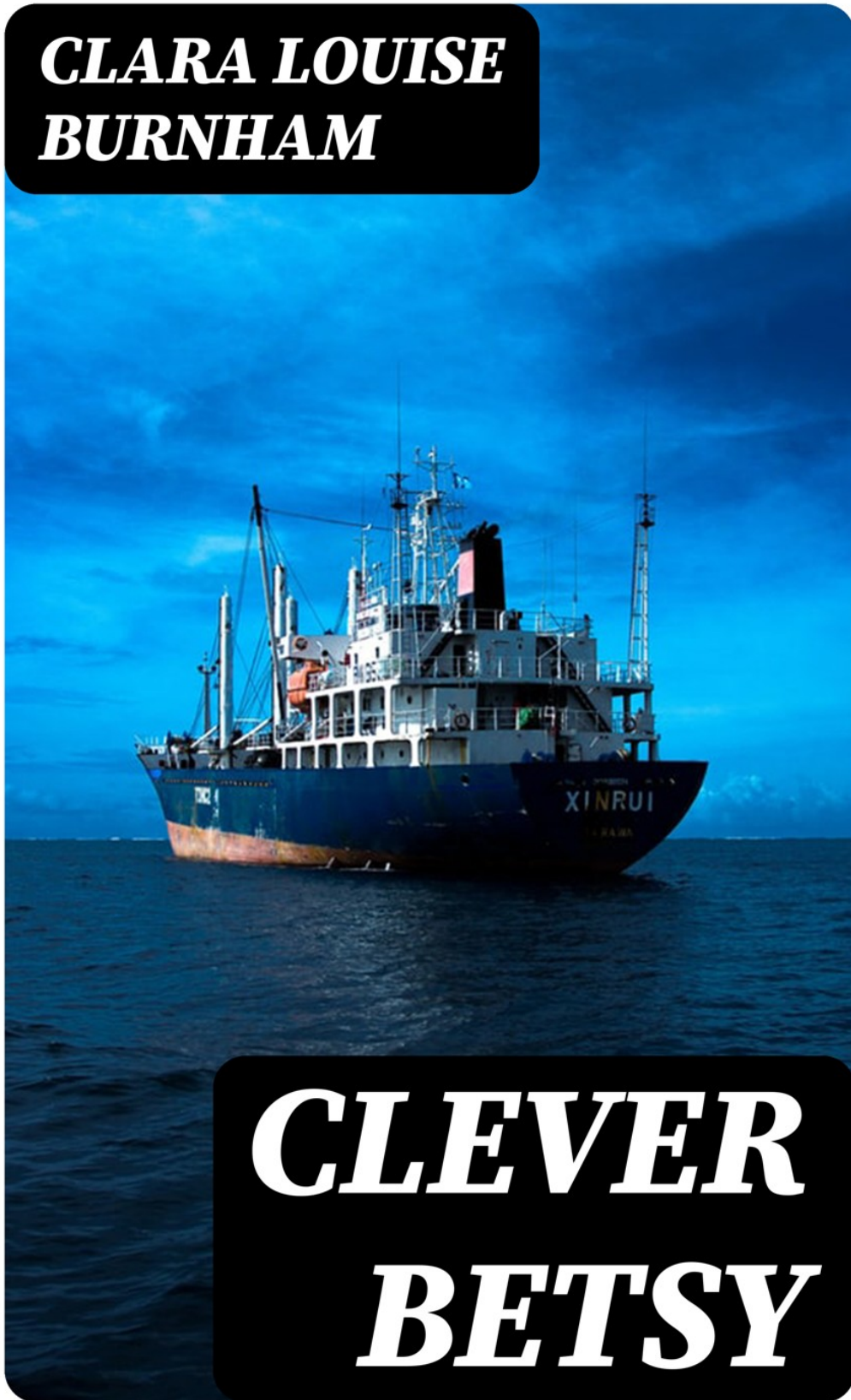


***CLARA LOUISE
BURNHAM***



***CLEVER
BETSY***

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Clara Louise Burnham

Clever Betsy

A Novel

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CHAPTER I

OPENING THE COTTAGE

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“HELLO there!” The man with grizzled hair and bronzed face under a shabby yachting-cap stopped in his leisurely ramble up the street of a seaport village, and his eyes lighted at sight of a spare feminine figure, whose lean vigorous arms were shaking a long narrow rug at a cottage gate. “Ahoy there—The Clever Betsy!” he went on.

The energetic woman vouchsafed a sidewise twist of her mouth intended for a smile, but did not cease from her labors, and a cloud of dust met the hastened approach of the seaman.

“Here, there’s enough o’ that! Don’t you know your captain?” he went on, dodging the woolen fringe which snapped near his dark cheek.

“*My* captain!” retorted the energetic one, while the rug billowed still more wildly. She was a woman of his own middle age, and the cloth tied around her head did not add to her charms; but the man’s eyes softened as they rested on her.

“Here! You carry too much sail. Take a reef!” he cried; and deftly snatching the rug, in an instant it was trailing on the walk behind him, while Betsy Foster stared, offended.

“How long ye been here, Betsy?”

“A couple o’ days,” replied the woman, adjusting the cheese-cloth covering more firmly behind her ears.

“Why didn’t ye let a feller know?”

“Thought I wouldn’t trouble trouble till trouble troubled me.”

The man smiled. “The Clever Betsy,” he said musingly. They regarded one another for a silent moment. “Why ain’t ye ever clever to me?”

She sniffed.

“Why don’t ye fat up some?” he asked again.

“If I was as lazy as you are, probably I should,” she returned, with the sidewise grimace appearing again, and the breeze from the wide ocean a stone’s throw away ruffling the sparse straight locks that escaped from her headdress.

“Goin’ to marry me this time, Betsy?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“Same old reason.”

“But I *tell* ye,” said the man, in half-humorous, half-earnest appeal, “I’ve told ye a dozen times I didn’t know which I liked best then. If you’d happened to go home from singin’-school with me that night it would ‘a’ ben you.”

“And I say it ain’t proper respect to Annie’s memory for you to talk that way.”

“I ain’t disrespectful. There never were two such nice girls in one village before. I nearly grew wall-eyed tryin’ to look at you both at once. Annie and I were happy as clams for fifteen years. She’s been gone five, and I’ve asked ye four separate times if you’d go down the hill o’ life with me, and there ain’t any sense in your refusin’ and flappin’ rugs in my face.”

“You know I don’t like this sort o’ foolin’, Hiram. I wish you’d be done with it.”

“I ain’t ever goin’ to be done with it, Betsy, not while you live and I live.”

“Have some sense,” she rejoined. “We both made our choice when we were young and we must abide by it—both of us.”

“You didn’t marry the Bruce family.”

“I did, too.”

Betsy Foster’s eyes, suddenly reminiscent, did not suit in their expression the brusqueness of her tone. She saw again her young self, heart-sick with the disappointment of her girlish fancy, leaving this little village for the city, and finding a haven with the bride who became her friend as well as mistress.

“I did, too,” she repeated. “It was my silver weddin’ only last week, when Mr. Irving had his twenty-fourth birthday.”

“Is Irving that old? Bless me! Then,” hopefully, “if he’s twenty-four he don’t need to be tied to your apron-strings. Strikes me you’re as much of a widow as I am a widower. There ain’t many o’ the Bruce family left for you to be married to. After Irving’s mother died, I can see plain enough why you were a lot o’ help to Mr. Bruce; but when he married again you didn’t have any call to look after him any longer; and seein’ he died about the same time poor Annie did, you’ve been free as air these five years. You don’t need to pretend you think such an awful lot o’ the widder Bruce, ’cause I know ye don’t. Don’t ye suppose I remember how all your feathers stood on end when Mr. Bruce married her?”

Betsy gave a fleeting glance over her shoulder toward the window of the cottage.

“’Twasn’t natural that I should want to see anybody in Irving’s mother’s place, but she’s—”

“I remember as if ’twas yesterday,” interrupted Hiram, “how you said ’twas Irving she married him for; how that she could never keep her fingers out of any pie, and she didn’t like the hats Mr. Bruce bought for Irving, so she married him to choose ’em herself.”

Betsy’s lips twitched in a short laugh. “Well, I guess there was somethin’ in that,” she answered.

Hiram pursued what he considered his advantage. “When Irving was on the football team at college, you told me yourself, standin’ right by this gate, that she’d go to the game, and when she wasn’t faintin’ because he was knocked out, she was hollerin’ at him how to play.”

Betsy bridled. “Well, what’s all this for?” she demanded.

“It’s to show you plain as the nose on your face that if you ever was married to the Bruce family you’re a widder now; just as much as I’m a widower.”

“No, sir, for better or for worse,” returned Betsy doggedly.

“Get out. They’re dead, Mr. and Mrs. Bruce, both dead; and the widder Bruce nothin’ at all to you.”

“Stepmother to Mr. Irving,” declared Betsy.

“Well, he’s used to it by this time. Had twelve years of it. Holy mackerel, that kid twenty-four! I can’t realize it. His mother—”

“No, no,” said Betsy quickly.

“Well, *she* anyway, Mrs. Bruce, went over to Europe to meet him last year, didn’t she, when she took you?”

“Of course she did. He went abroad when he left college, and do you suppose she could stand it not to be in part of his trip and tell him what to do?”

“There now! It’s plain how you feel toward *that* member o’ the family.”

“But I told you, didn’t I? Can’t you understand English? I told you ‘for better or for *worse*.’”

“Go ‘long, Betsy, go ‘long! That husky football hero don’t need you to fight his battles. If she presses him too hard, he’ll get married himself. I guess he’s got a pretty solid place in the bank. When did you get back?”

“A month ago.”

“Mrs. Bruce come down here with you?”

Hiram’s eyes as he asked the question left his companion’s face for the first time, and roved toward the windows of the cottage retreating amid its greenery.

As if his question had evoked the apparition, a light-haired lady suddenly appeared in the open doorway. She was a woman of about forty-five years, but her blonde hair concealed its occasional silver threads, and her figure was girlishly slender. She regarded the couple for a moment through her gold eye-glasses, and then came down the steps and through the garden-path.

“I thought I couldn’t be mistaken, Captain Salter,” she said graciously, extending one hand, ringed and sparkling, and with the other protecting the waves of her carefully dressed hair from the boisterous breeze.

The captain, continuing to trail the rug behind him, touched his cap and allowed his rough fingers to be taken for a moment.

“The Clever Betsy here was carrying too much sail,” he explained. “I took ’em down.”

Mrs. Bruce laughed amiably.

“And found you’d run into a squall, no doubt,” she responded, observing her handmaid’s reddened countenance.

Mrs. Bruce’s eyes could be best described as busy. There was nothing subtle about her glances. She made it quite evident that nothing escaped her, and the trim exactness of her dress and appearance seemed to match her observations.

“It seems good to be back in Fairport,” she went on. “One summer’s absence is quite enough, though I plan to slip away just for a little while to take a look at the Yellowstone this year.”

“That so? Should think you’d had travelin’ enough for one spell,” rejoined Hiram.

“Oh, it’s an appetite that grows with what it feeds on, Captain Salter. I dare say you have been a rover, too. I know how all you sea-captains are.”

“No’m. My line’s ben fish, mostly.”

“And,” added Mrs. Bruce, “taking care of us poor land-lubbers in summer. My son was well satisfied with your sale of his boat. I don’t know whether he will get another this summer or not. You’ll be here as usual, I hope?”

“Looks that way.”

“I’m glad. I’m positively attached to the Gentle Annie.”

“Haven’t got her no more,” returned Hiram quietly. “I’ve parted with her.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. I suppose the new one’s better.”

“Well, she’s just as good, anyway.”

“But if she’s not better, I don’t see why you let the Annie go.”

“‘Taint always in our power to hold on to things when we’d like to,” responded Hiram equably.

Mrs. Bruce’s eyes shone with interest behind her bifocals. “Poor man!” she thought. “How improvident these ignorant people are! Probably went into debt, and had to lose his boat, and calculated on doing enough business this summer to pay for the new one.”

“And what,” she asked, with an air of gracious patronage, “will you call this one? Gentle Annie second, of course.”

He shook his head, his sea-blue eyes fixed intrepidly on the object of his affections, who regarded him threateningly.

“Can’t be any Annie second,” he returned quietly.

“Now I think you make a great mistake, Captain Salter,” said Mrs. Bruce, with vigor. “For your own welfare I feel you ought to keep that name. The summer people have been attached to the Gentle Annie so long, and had such confidence in her.”

Hiram nodded; but Mrs. Bruce could not catch his fixed eye as she wished, to emphasize her point.

“They were right,” he answered. “She was a good craft.”

“Confidence in her and you too, I should have said, of course,” went on the lady.

“Yes, we sort o’ went together, pretty comfortable; but—well, I’ve lost her.”

“Yes, but there’s a good-will goes with the name. You make a great mistake not to keep it. Captain Salter and the Gentle Annie; people have said it so many years and had all their sails and their picnics and clambakes with you, it’s like throwing away capital for you to take a new name for your boat. Now if you haven’t already had it put on—”

“I have.”

Hiram’s eyes were steady, and his lady-love was nervously fighting with the jealous wind for her cheese-cloth headdress, her face apparently flushed by the effort, and her eyes defiant.

“What have you named her?” asked Mrs. Bruce, in disapproval.

“The Clever Betsy.”

“I don’t like it, emphatically. It seems very strange, and it will to everybody.”

“Yes, at first,” rejoined Hiram imperturbably, “but you can get used to anything. It used to be Captain Salter and the Gentle Annie; but in future it’s goin’ to be Captain Salter and the Clever Betsy; and after a while that’s goin’ to seem just as natural as the other.”

The speaker continued to rest his gaze on the narrow reddened countenance, which looked back furiously.

Mrs. Bruce attributed his averted face to shyness, but the direction of his glance gave her an idea.

“Well, I’m sure, Betsy, *you* should be pleased,” she remarked. “One might think the boat was named for you.”

“Betsy wasn’t ever clever to me,” said Hiram calmly. “She began spellin’ me down at school here when we were children, and she’s ben spellin’ me down ever since.”

Mrs. Bruce looked curiously at the frowning countenance of the capable woman who had meant so much in her husband's household.

"Just like a snapdragon always," went on Hiram slowly; "touch her and she'd fly all to pieces; and I guess you put on the finishin' touch, takin' her to Europe, Mrs. Bruce. She's so toplotical to-day that she won't scarcely speak to me."

"Betsy was a good traveler; I wouldn't ask a better," said Mrs. Bruce absently. The subject of the boat's name rankled. Her desire to coerce humanity for its own good was like a fire always laid and ready to be kindled, and Hiram had applied the match.

"What do *you* think of the new name, Betsy? Don't you think your old friend would have done better to stick to the Gentle Annie?"

"That's exactly what I think," was the explosive response. "That's the only name that'll ever be connected with Cap'n Salter in this world, and he'd better make the most of it. Hiram, if you're perishin' to wear a trail I'll make you one out o' paper-cambric. Give me my rug. I want to go in the house."

Salter motioned toward the speaker with his head, then met Mrs. Bruce's eyes.

"You heard?" he said. "That's what I say. Snappy, snappy."

"I'm very sorry," said Mrs. Bruce impressively, "that it's painted on. It's a bad idea and won't bring you luck."

"Well now, we'll see," rejoined Hiram. "I feel just the other way round. I think it's a good idea and will bring me luck. Folks'll begin to say Cap'n Salter and the Clever Betsy,

Cap'n Salter and the Clever Betsy, and first news you know there'll be—"

He paused. Lightnings would have shot from Betsy Foster's eyes had they been able to express all she felt; but the audacity of his look and manner conveyed a totally new idea to Mrs. Bruce.

"I wish you'd both come out with me this afternoon," he went on. "I'll show you just what a good, reliable, faithful craft I've got. A bit unsteady sometimes, mebbe, but that's only because she's smart and sassy; she always comes up to the mark in an emergency, and never goes back on her skipper. She's fast, too, and—"

"Sailin'!" interrupted Betsy, unable to endure another moment. "I guess if you saw the inside o' that cottage you wouldn't talk to me about sailin'. If you're so fond of peacockin' with that rug, I won't deprive you of it. You can leave it on the step when you get through."

Mrs. Bruce's idea received confirmation by Betsy's manner and her precipitate departure up the garden-path, and she looked at Hiram Salter blankly. Betsy Foster was the prop of her household. She was the property of the Bruce family. Did this man suppose for one moment that just because they had gone to school together, he could remove her from her useful position? What a selfish, impossible thought! Of course the man wasn't in love with Betsy. Nobody could be in love with such a severely plain creature; and yet that fancy of the new boat and the new name! It argued a plan of wooing which had some poetry in it.

Here was an affair which Mrs. Bruce would certainly stop with a high hand if there were any real threat in it; but

fortunately Betsy would consider it as unthinkable as she herself. If ever displeasure was writ large all over a woman it had been evident in Betsy Foster throughout the interview.

After a short reflective silence during which, both hands behind him, her companion waved the rug in gentle ripples, and met her gaze with an undisturbed smile, she spoke.

“Do take my advice still, Captain Salter,” she said. “Wipe out the Clever Betsy and go back to the Gentle Annie.”

CHAPTER II

MISTRESS AND MAID

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MRS. BRUCE remained with the captain at the gate for fifteen minutes longer before she re-entered the house. Hiram came as far as the door with her and laid the rug inside. He caught a glimpse of Betsy, stormily dusting and polishing in the living-room, but contented himself with touching his cap to Mrs. Bruce, and disappearing down the garden path.

That lady looked sharply at her factotum as she entered the room. Mankind loves a lover undoubtedly, as a rule; but there are exceptions. Mrs. Bruce decidedly did not love anybody who proposed to deprive her of her right hand: cook, waitress, lady's maid, housekeeper, either of which posts Betsy was capable of filling in the defection of the regular incumbent.

Betsy was a none-such, and Mrs. Bruce knew it sufficiently well to have swallowed her wrath on many previous occasions when her strong will had collided with that of her handmaid. During her husband's lifetime Mrs. Bruce had discharged the New England woman several times in her most magnificent manner; but the ebullition had not been noticed by Betsy, who pursued the even tenor of her way as one who had more important matters to think of. Since Mr. Bruce's death his widow had not proceeded to such lengths, some intuition perhaps warning her that the spiritual cable which held the none-such to her service had lost its strongest strands and would not stand a strain.

She looked at the faithful woman now with a new curiosity. Mankind loves a lover. Yes, of course; but Betsy couldn't have a lover! The cheese-cloth binding the hair away from the high sallow forehead, taken in connection with the prominent thin nose and retreating chin, presented the class of profile which explains the curious human semblance taken on by a walnut when similarly coiffed. No—that designing sailor was tired of living alone. He wanted a housekeeper and a cook. How did he dare! Quite a blaze of indignation mounted in the breast of Betsy's fortunate owner. What a blessed thing that Betsy was the sort of woman who could see into a millstone and could be trusted to flout her deceitful wooer to the end. Mrs. Bruce spoke with gracious playfulness.

“You never told me Captain Salter was a beau of yours, Betsy.”

The other did not cease to beat up the cushions of the wicker chairs.

“I don't know as I ever did take the time to reg'larly sit down and give you my history, Mrs. Bruce,” was the reply.

And that lady took a few moments to reflect upon the spirit of the crisp words, finally deciding to veer away from the subject.

“Now what can I do to help you, Betsy? I know you want everything spick and span before that cook comes tomorrow.”

Betsy looked up.

“I've laid the silver out there on the dining-room table. You might clean it. Here, let me put this apron on you.” And abruptly abandoning the cushions, the speaker hurried into

the dining-room, divided from the living-room only by an imaginary line, and seizing an enveloping gingham apron, concealed Mrs. Bruce's trim China silk from head to foot.

The mistress sat down at the table and opened the silver-polish, and Betsy returned to her work.

"I've been asking Captain Salter about the neighbors, and especially about my little protégée."

"Which one? Oh, you mean Mrs. Pogram's girl!"

"Yes, Rosalie Vincent. With that name and her pretty face and graceful figure, it did seem too bad that she shouldn't have her chance. I remember, though, you didn't altogether approve of my sending her away from washing Mrs. Pogram's dishes."

"Washin' Mrs. Pogram's dishes was real safe," returned Betsy. "Rosalie was pretty, and poor, and young; and that's a combination that had better stay right in the home village under some good woman's wing. Mrs. Pogram's a clever soul, though some like putty. If she hadn't been, she wouldn't have spared Rosalie, I s'pose."

"Oh, it wasn't for long," replied Mrs. Bruce. "I thought it only fair that the child should have one season's course in English, with such a yearning as she had after poetry and all things poetical. Such a doom as it seemed to be to peel Mrs. Pogram's vegetables and wash her dishes. I can always discern an artist," added Mrs. Bruce complacently, "even in the most unlikely places; and that girl had a touch of the divine fire. I recognized it that day when she recited the bit of Browning up here."

Betsy's eyes happening to fall on the silver-polish, she remarked dryly.

“Well, whitin’ ’s safer than Brownin’ for her sort, and I thought she was contented enough.”

Betsy’s two-year-old disapproval of this one of her mistress’s undertakings revived. Education was a good thing, without doubt, but according to Betsy’s judgment it was best, under circumstances of such dependence as existed with Mrs. Pogram’s pretty adopted child, to let well enough alone. Mrs. Pogram’s principal motive in giving the girl a home had been the material help she could render, and it was a doubtful experiment to send her to the new environment of the city, and the novel companionship of her fellow students, unless her benefactress intended to prolong her watch over the young girl’s fortunes; and this Betsy knew would not be the case; for long before Rosalie’s term of study was ended, Mrs. Bruce’s energies would be directed toward superintending the affairs of somebody else. The girl’s grateful letters had begun to be ignored some time before Mrs. Bruce joined her adored boy in Europe; and it is doubtful when she would have thought again of Rosalie Vincent, had she not returned to the village where the young girl had attracted her fleeting fancy.

“I gave her the wings to soar,” she now added virtuously, “and I inquired of Captain Salter if she had used them. I found his report quite unsatisfactory.”

“Why, where is Rosalie?” asked Betsy quickly, stopping her labors in the interest of her query.

“Captain Salter wasn’t sure. He said he supposed Mrs. Pogram knew, but there had been some recent quarrel with a brother of Mrs. Pogram’s and it had ended in Rosalie’s going away.”

“Soarin’, perhaps,” remarked Betsy dryly, grasping the legs of an unoffending table and giving it vicious tweaks with the dust-cloth. “Just as well folks shouldn’t be given wings sometimes, in my opinion. When a bird’s got plumage like Rosalie’s, it’d better stick to the long grass. The world’s just full o’ folks that if they catch sight o’ the brightness never rest till they get a shot at it and drag it down.”

“Was she so pretty? Let’s see, was she dark or light? Oh, I remember her hair was blonde.”

Betsy gave one look at her employer. It was entirely characteristic that two years should have sunk the village girl’s memory in a haze.

Mrs. Bruce sighed and began to polish another fork. “It seldom pays to try to help people,” she said. “I distinctly remember the girl had talent, and I thought she might get a position in one of the Portland schools if she had a little training and applied herself.”

“Her letters to you certainly sounded as if she was workin’ her best.”

“Did they?” vaguely. “Perhaps they did. Well, very likely she has gone to take a position then.”

“Not in summer time, I guess,” remarked Betsy.

“I don’t seem to remember any brother of Mrs. Pogram’s,” said Mrs. Bruce plaintively.

“Humph! You’ve probably bought ribbons of him lots o’ times. He sells ’em up in Portland, and I’ll bet it’s a strain on him every time he measures off over thirty-five and a half inches for a yard. Brown’s his name. Loomis Brown; and it would seem more fittin’ if ’twas Lucy. Such a hen-betty I

never saw in all my days. I wonder if it's possible he took to shinin' up to Rosalie."

"Oh, he's a bachelor?"

"Law, yes. He wouldn't want to pay for a marriage license, but p'raps he took such a shine to Rosalie as she grew older that it spurred him on to the extravagance. No tellin'. If that's the case, no wonder she took wings."

"It's very tiresome," said Mrs. Bruce, "the way girls will marry after one has done one's best for them."

"Yes, Mrs. Bruce. The next time you take a fancy to a village girl, you give her a course in cookin' instead of English. She can jaw her husband all right without any teachin'; but it takes trainin' to make good bread."

Mrs. Bruce sighed leniently. "That is your point of view, naturally," she said. "You could hardly be expected to have that divining rod which recognizes the artistic. Strange how much better I remember that girl's gift and her unstudied gestures than I do her face."

Betsy paused long enough in her undertakings to pull up the bib of her mistress's apron, which had slipped, endangering the pretty silk gown. There was a permanent line in Betsy's forehead, which might have been named "Mrs. Bruce the second"; but she fastened the apron as carefully now as she did all things pertaining to that lady's welfare, and made no reply to the reflection upon her æsthetic capabilities. Betsy would not have known the meaning of the word æsthetic, but she would have declared unhesitatingly that if it characterized Mrs. Bruce she was willing not to have it describe herself. Not that she had a dislike of her mistress. She took her as she found her. Mr.

Bruce had been attached to her, and Betsy's duty was to the bearer of his name. She seldom contended with her mistress, nor had any argument. She said to herself simply that it was hard to teach an old dog new tricks; and while it might seem a trifle rough to mention an old dog in connection with a lady of Mrs. Bruce's attractive appearance, the sense of the axiom was extremely applicable, since Mrs. Bruce could become no more set in all essentials if she lived to be a hundred.

Betsy very rightly realizing that avoidable discord was foolishness, lived her philosophy, and contented herself with mental reservations which would have astonished her complacent mistress mightily.

On the evening, twelve years ago, when Mr. Bruce announced to his housekeeper his impending marriage, she shouldered this cross resolutely.

He had been a man of few words, and on this occasion he said simply to the woman who had seen his happiness with the bride of his youth, "I find myself very lonely, Betsy. I am going to marry Miss Flushing."

"Very well, sir," she replied quietly, though her heart leaped to her throat and her thoughts flew to the twelve-year-old boy who was then at home on his vacation. "Have you told Mr. Irving, sir?"

She remembered the father's face as he replied, "Yes. That boy, Betsy, is a manly little chap. Miss Flushing is devoted to him and has gained his affection already; but—it was a blow to him. I saw it. A surprise, a great surprise."

Betsy remembered to this day how she bit her tongue to keep it from speaking.

“He talked to me though,” the father had continued, “more like one man to another than like a child; but after being very civil about it, he announced that I mustn’t expect him to call her mother, because he should not be able to.”

Betsy had nodded. “Mr. Irving had a mother out of the ordinary, Mr. Bruce,” she replied very quietly, but with the hot blood pressing in her head; then she went up decorously to her room, closed the door, and indulged in one storm of weeping; after which she shouldered the cross above mentioned, which like all crosses heartily borne, lightened as the years went on.

One thing was certain. Greater devotion was never displayed by a stepmother; and if Irving Bruce had mental reservations, too, he did not divulge them to the faithful woman who was part of his earliest remembrance.

CHAPTER III

IRVING BRUCE

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MRS. BRUCE had retired from her labors, but a vigorous cleansing process was still going on in the cottage, when a man's footsteps again sounded on the garden-path. Some one set a suit-case down on the porch, and then appeared in the doorway for a moment of inspection.

Betsy started at sight of the tall, gray-clad apparition.

"Mr. Irving!" she ejaculated, and the transfiguring expression which crossed her face gave the key at once to her loyalty. "Go 'way from here, we ain't a bit ready for you!" she said severely.

He strode forward and gently shook the speaker's angular shoulders instead of her busy hands.

"Great that I could get here so soon," he returned, continuing to rest his hands on her shoulders, while she looked up into the eyes set generously apart under level brows.

"He ain't any job lot," she thought for the hundredth time, "he's a masterpiece." But all the time she was trying to frown.

"We ain't ready for you," she repeated. "The cook hasn't come."

"Bully!" ejaculated the unwelcome one. "It's the aim of my existence to catch you where there isn't any cook. Are the mackerel running?"

"You'll have to ask Cap'n Salter or some other lazy coot about that. Mackerel running! Humph! My own running has

been all I could attend to the last two days. Mrs. Pogram's supposed to look after the cottage—air it and so on; but she always was slower'n molasses and I s'pose she don't get any younger nor spryer as the years go on. I've found mildew, yes, I have, *mildew*, in a number o' places."

The young man smiled, dropped his hands, and sauntered to a window overlooking the tumbling blue.

"She has what's-her-name there, that girl she adopted," he responded carelessly. "Why doesn't she shift such duties upon her?"

"Oh, you remember Rosalie, do you?" asked Betsy dryly, as she resumed her work.

"To be sure. That was her name. Pretty name. Pretty girl. A real village beauty."

"Yes," said Betsy. "You very likely remember Mrs. Bruce took a lot of interest in her. Had her here to speak poetry one day."

"Oh, I remember her very well," returned the young man. "I don't recall the poetry though. So that was her forte. Apt to interfere with opening up and airing out other people's cottages, I suppose."

"Yes, if it's encouraged. Hers was encouraged."

Betsy's lips snapped together and her tone caused her companion to glance around at her over his shoulder.

"Mildew sort of got on your nerves, Betsy?" he asked, amused. "Don't worry. There's a free-for-all chemistry here that will fix it up in no time. Drop that duster and come and look at the ocean. It will steady you."

"Steady me!" Betsy gave a derisive grunt. "Tell that to the marines. I've had experience of its steadiness the last

month, haven't I?"

Irving laughed at certain memories of his companion's walnut profile, with lips pursed in the throes of endurance.

"You aren't a star sailor, are you?" he returned.

"I learned the meanin' o' one phrase o' Scripture; learned it for life. 'Unstable as water.' It fits some folks just splendid and you couldn't say anything worse about 'em. My! will I ever forget tryin' to wait on Mrs. Bruce and fix my hair in that stateroom! Never got my arms up that there didn't come a lurch and knock my elbow against the woodwork fit to break the skin."

"You ought to be better upholstered, Betsy," said Irving.

"And varnish!" she continued, with reminiscent loathing. "Shall I ever be able to use varnish again!"

"Joy!" exclaimed Irving. "Then I'm not in any danger of being shellacked! I never felt certain in childhood's happy hour that keeping me surgically clean would wholly satisfy you."

"No, sir," said Betsy warmly, "the ocean won't get me to look at it this summer. All diamonds, and blue sparkles, and white feathers, just as if butter wouldn't melt in its mouth; then when it gets you in its clutches, bangs you around from pillar to post and nearly blows the hair off your head. I know its tricks now. It'll never deceive *me* again."

Irving smiled out at the maligned billows. "Looks pretty good to me," he returned. "Wonder what I shall do about a boat. Has Mrs. Bruce said any more about the Yellowstone?"

"Yes, spoke of it this mornin' to Cap'n Salter."

"Oh, has she been out with Hiram already?"

"No, he was lally-gaggin' around here for a while."

“How is old Hiram?” The question was affectionate.

Betsy pushed an upturned rug under a table-leg.

“Oh, about as usual, I guess. Gets more like himself every year, same as we all do.”

“Well, he couldn’t do better. He’s a good sort.” Irving smiled at some memory. “I must have made that man’s life a burden. What a lot of patience he had! But when the end was reached, I can feel that hand of his come down on me, big as a ham, and toss me away as if I’d been a cunner he was throwing back. Mrs. Salter, too. Talk about salt of the earth! I suppose that must have been a stock Fairport pun during her life. Many a time she begged me off. The gentle Annie! I should think so. Let’s see. How long has she been gone?”

“Five years.”

“And the captain has never taken notice since, has he?”

“Don’t ask *me*,” was the curt response; and a table was whisked completely around with a celerity which must have given it vertigo.

“Betsy! Betsy!” It was a cautious call which came quietly from the invisible.

Betsy straightened herself and moved toward it, and the silent moment was followed by the swift entrance of Mrs. Bruce.

“My *dear* boy!” she exclaimed, aggrieved. “I thought I heard a man’s voice. How long have you been here? Betsy, why didn’t you tell me!”

The young man’s eyes were kind as he turned and came to meet the speaker, and his manner seemed very quiet in

contrast to her alert, fussy personality and the froufrou of her taffetas.

“Good-morning, Madama,” he said, returning her nervous embrace lightly. “I’ve asked Betsy so many questions since I broke in here, that she couldn’t in civility leave me.”

Betsy returned to her labors, deaf to her mistress’s remarks. She knew that Mrs. Bruce had a chronic objection to her having a tête-à-tête, however short, with Irving. It was as if the widow were jealous of the twelve years’ advantage which her maid had over her; and notwithstanding Betsy’s humble position, her mistress constantly imagined that they referred, when together, to events which she had not shared, and spoke on subjects which would be dropped upon her appearance.

The newcomer slipped her hand through the young man’s arm, and moved with him as he returned to the window.

“Why didn’t you telegraph? How did you happen to come so soon?”

“Oh, I just saw that the bank was run by a lot of egoists who supposed that they could manage it without me, just as they have for thirty years, so I thought I would make the most of this last summer of their self-satisfaction, and take all that was coming to me, before I get into the harness.”

“Very wise; and I hope when you do get into harness you’ll never make such a slave of yourself as your dear father did.”

“You never can tell. I rather dread my own proclivities. If I should ever work as hard as I’ve played, the business world is going to be jarred when I leap into it.”

Mrs. Bruce hung fondly on his arm, rejoicing in the hard muscle she felt through his light sleeve.

“Well,” she said, “I’m glad you could come. There is such a wonderful feeling of freedom in this restful spot. Sometimes,” pensively, “I think the greatest blessing we have in life is personal freedom. I suffocate without it, and it is astonishing how difficult it is to get, in the ordinary affairs of life.” Then, with sudden attention, “What makes you wear that tie with that suit? I don’t like it at all, anyway. That isn’t one that I gave you.”

The young man’s hand mechanically sought his throat. “No, Madama,” he admitted, still looking absently from the window.

“I should think, Irving, as many neckties as I pick out for you, you might wear one of them when you’re going to be with me.”

“But I can’t bear to wear your neckties,” he returned gently, “they’re so decorative in my room. To tie them all up and bury them under a collar and vest would be a shame. I hang them on my tie-rack, where they can be admired morning, noon, and night. You know I keep trying to curb your extravagance in that line. You’ll impoverish yourself so that you can’t wear silk stockings if you go on like this. Every few days a new tie to go on the rack.”

“Nonsense,” returned Mrs. Bruce curtly. “If I didn’t have such good taste, of course I shouldn’t venture to buy ties for a man; but even as a girl I was considered to have the most perfect taste. I was famous for it, and I’m sure, Irving, I’ve tried to instill it into you.”