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Rosemary in Search of a Father



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**A. M. Williamson ,
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Rosemary in
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**CHAPTER ONE
THE WHITE GIRL ON THE
TERRACE: THE ROSE
GIRL AT THE CASINO**

THERE was a young man in Monte Carlo. He had come in a motor car, and he had come a long way, but he hardly knew why he had come. He hardly knew in these days why he did anything. But then, one must do something.

It would be Christmas soon, and he thought that he would rather get it over on the Riviera than anywhere else, because the blue and gold weather would not remind him of other Christmases which were gone – pure, white, cold Christmases, musical with joy-bells and sweet with aromatic pine, the scent of trees born to be Christmas trees.

There had been a time when he had fancied it would be a

wonderful thing to see the Riviera. He had thought what it would be like to be a rich man, and bring a certain girl here for a moon of honey and roses.

She was the most beautiful girl in the world, or he believed her so, which is exactly the same thing; and he had imagined the joy of walking with her on just such a terrace as this Casino terrace where he was walking now, alone. She would be in white, with one of those long ermine things that women call stoles; an ermine muff (the big, "granny" kind that swallows girlish arms up to the dimples in their elbows) and a hat which they would have bought together in Paris.

They would have bought jewels, too, in the same street where they found the hat; the Rue de la Paix, which she had told him she longed to see. And she would be wearing some of the jewels with the white dress – just a few, not many, of course. A string of pearls (she loved pearls) a swallow brooch (he had heard her say she admired those swallow brooches, and he never forgot anything she said); with perhaps a sapphire-studded buckle on her white suéde belt. Yes, that would be all, except the rings, which would lie hidden under her gloves, on the dear little hands whose nails were like enamelled rose leaves.

When she moved, walking beside him on the terrace, there would be a mysterious silky whisper and rustle, something like that you hear in the woods, in the spring, when the leaves are crisp with their pale green youth, and you shut your eyes, listening to the breeze telling them the secrets of life.

There would be a fragrance about the white dress and the laces, and ermine, and the silk things that you could not see, – a fragrance as mysterious as the rustling, for it would seem to belong to the girl, and not to have come from any bottle, or bag of sachet powder. A sweet, fresh, indefinable fragrance, like the smell of a tea rose after rain.

They would have walked together, they two, and he would have been so proud of her, that every time a passer-by cast a glance of admiration at her face, he would feel that he could hardly keep in a laugh of joy, or a shout, "She is mine – she is mine."

But he had been poor in the old days, when from far away he had thought of this terrace, and the moon of honey and roses, and love. It had all been a dream, then, as it was now; too sweet ever to come true.

He thought of the dream, and of the boy who had dreamed it, half bitterly, half sadly, on this his first day in the place of the dream.

He was rich – as rich as he had seen himself in the impossible picture, and it would have been almost too easy to buy the white dress, and the ermine, and the pearls. But there was no one for whom he would have been happy to buy them. The most beautiful girl in the world was not in his world now; and none other had had the password to open the door of his heart since she had gone out, locking it behind her.

"She would have liked the auto," he said to himself. And then,

a moment later, "I wonder why I came?"

It was a perfect Riviera day. Everybody in Monte Carlo who was not in the Casino was sauntering on the terrace in the sun; for it was that hour before luncheon when people like to say, "How do you do? – How nice to meet you here!" to their friends.

The young man from far away had not, so far as he knew, either enemies or friends at Monte Carlo. He was not conscious of the slightest desire to say "How do you do?" to any of the pretty people he met, although there is a superstition that every soul longs for kindred souls at Christmas time.

He had not been actively unhappy before he left the Hotel de Paris and strolled out on the terrace, to have his first sight of Monte Carlo by daylight. Always, there was the sore spot in his heart, and often it ached almost unbearably at night, or when the world hurt him with its beauty, which he must see without Her; but usually he kept the spot well covered up; and being healthy as well as young, he had cultivated that kind of contentment which Thoreau said was only desperate resignation in disguise. He took an interest in books, in politics, and sport and motor cars, and a good many other things; but on the terrace, the blue of the sea; the opal lights on the mountains; the gold glint of oranges among green, glittering leaves; the pearly glimmer of white roses thrown up like a spray against the sky, struck at his heart, and made the ache come back more sharply than it had for a long time.

If he had been a girl, tears would have blinded his eyes; but being what he was, he merely muttered in anger against himself,

"Hang it all, what a wretched ass I am," and turning his back on the sea, made his way as fast as he could into the Casino.

It was close upon twelve o'clock, and the "Rooms" had been open to the public for two hours. The "early gamblers" thronging the Atrium to wait till the doors opened, had run in and snatched seats for themselves at the first tables, or marked places to begin at eleven o'clock, if crowded away from the first. Later, less ardent enthusiasts had strolled in; and now, though it was not by any means the "high season" yet, there were rows of players or lookers on, three deep round each table.

The young man was from the South – though a South very different from this. He had the warm blood of Virginia in his veins, and just so much of the gambler's spirit as cannot be divided from a certain recklessness in a man with a temperament. He had seen plenty of life in his own country, in the nine years since he was twenty, and he knew all about roulette and *trente et quarante*, among other things desirable and undesirable.

Still, gambling seemed to be made particularly fascinating here, and he wanted to be fascinated, wanted it badly. He was in the mood for the heavy hush of the Rooms, for the closeness, and the rich perfumes, which mingling together seem like the smell of money piled on the green tables; he was in a mood for the dimmed light like dull gold, gold sifted into dust by passing through many hands.

He had got his ticket of admission to the Casino, after arriving yesterday evening; but the Rooms had not pleased him then. He

had not played, and had merely walked through, looking at the people; but now he went to a *trente et quarante* table, and reaching over the shoulders of the players – not so many as in the roulette rooms, – he put a five hundred franc note on *couleur*. It won. He let the money lie, and it won again. A third time and a fourth he left the notes on, and still luck was with him. He was in for a good run.

As it happened, nobody else had been playing higher than *plaques*, the handsome hundred franc gold pieces coined for the Principality of Monaco; and people began to watch the new comer, as they always do one who plays high and is lucky. On the fifth deal he had won the maximum. He took off half, and was leaving the rest to run, when a voice close to his shoulder said, "Oh, do take it all off. I feel it's going to lose now. To please *me*."

He glanced aside, and saw an exceedingly pretty, dark face, which looked vaguely familiar. With a smile, he took up all the notes, and only just in time. *Couleur* lost; inverse won.

"Oh, I'm so glad," said the owner of the pretty face. She spoke English with a slight, but bewitching foreign accent; and her eyes shone at him like brown jewels under the tilted brim of a hat made all of pink and crimson roses. She was rather like a rose, too, a rich, colourful, spicy rose, of the kind which unfolds early. He knew that he had seen her before, and wondered where.

After all, it was rather nice to be spoken to by someone other than a hotel manager or a waiter; someone who was good to look at, and friendly. He lost interest in the game, and gained interest

in the girl.

"Thank you," said he. "You've brought me luck."

"I hope you don't think I speak always to strangers, like that," said the girl in the rose hat. "But you see, I recognized you at once. I don't know if you remember me? No, I'm afraid you don't."

"Of course I remember you, only I can't think where we –"

"Why, it was in Paris. You saved my mother's little dog from being run over one day. We were both so grateful. Afterwards we saw you once or twice at tea at the Ritz, and you took off your hat, so you must have remembered then. Ah me, it's a long time ago!"

"Not so very," said the young man. "I remember well, now." (He wished her mother had not been quite such an appalling person, fat and painted.) "It was only last October. I'd just come to Paris. It was my first day there, when I picked up the little dog. Now, on my first day here, you pay me back for what I did then – as if it needed paying back! – by making me pick up my money. That's quite a coincidence."

They had moved away from the tables now, and were walking very slowly down the room. The young man smiled at the girl, as he crushed up the notes and stuffed them into his pocket. He saw that she was much prettier than he had thought her in Paris, if he had thought of her at all; and her dress of pale pink cloth was charming with the rose hat. Somehow, he was glad that she was not in white – with an ermine stole.

"So it is, quite a coincidence, and a pleasant one for me, since I meet again one who was once so kind," she said. "Especially it is good to meet a friend – if I may call you a friend? – when one is very sad."

"Of course you may call me a friend," said he, kindly. "I'm sorry to hear you are sad."

"That is why I told you the other meeting seemed a long time ago," explained the girl. "I was happy then. Now, I am breaking my heart, and I do not know what to do. Oh, I ought not to talk like this, for after all, you are a stranger. But you are English, or you are American; and men of those countries never misunderstand a woman, even if she is in trouble. We can feel ourselves safe with them."

"I'm American," he answered, "and I'm glad you feel like that. I wish I could help you in some way." He spoke kindly, but not with absolute warmth of sincerity. The girl saw this, and knew that he did not believe in her as she wished him to believe, as she intended to make him believe.

She looked up at him with sad and eloquent eyes, which softened his heart in spite of himself. "You can't help me, thank you," she said, "except by kind words and kind thoughts. I think, though, that it would do me good to tell you things, if you really take an interest?"

"Of course I do." He was speaking the truth now. He was human, and she was growing prettier, as she grew more pathetic, every moment.

"And would you advise me a little? I have nobody else to ask. My mother and I know no one at Monte Carlo. Perhaps you would walk with me on the terrace and let me talk?"

"Not on the terrace," he said, quickly, for he could not bear to meet the sweet ghost of the past in the white dress and ermine stole, as he gave advice to the flesh and blood reality of the present, in the pink frock and roses. "What about Ciro's? Couldn't we find your mother somewhere, and get her to chaperon us for lunch? I should think it must be very jolly now, in the Galerie Charles Trois."

"So it would be; but my poor mother is very ill in her bed," said the girl.

"Would she – er – do you think, as I'm an American, and we're almost old friends, mind letting you have lunch just with me alone? Of course, if she would mind, you must say no. But I must confess, I'm hungry as a wolf; and it would be somewhere to sit and talk together, quietly, you know."

"You are hungry," echoed the girl. "Ah, I would wager something that you don't really know what hunger is. But I know – now."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean it is well my mother is ill, and doesn't wish to eat, for there would be nothing for her, if she did."

"Good heavens! And you?"

"I have had nothing to eat since yesterday morning, and then only a biscuit with a glass of water."

"My poor girl, we won't say anything more about chaperons. Come along with me to Ciro's this instant, to lunch, and tell me everything."

He was completely won over now, and looked very handsome, with a slight flush on his brown face, and his dark eyes bright with excitement.

The girl lowered her long lashes, perhaps to hide tears.

When she did this, and drooped the corners of her mouth, she was very engaging, and the young man tingled all over with pity. That poor, pretty creature, starving, in her charming pink dress and hat of roses. How strange life was! It was something to be thankful for that he had met her.

A little while ago, he had walked through the Galerie Charles Trois, thinking how delightful the tables looked at Ciro's, and making up his mind to return there for lunch. But afterwards, on the terrace, he had been so miserable that he would probably have forgotten all about his plan, if it had not been for the girl.

Now, he chose a small table in a corner of the balcony, close to the glass screen. A month later, he might have had to engage it long beforehand; but to-day, though the place was well filled with pretty women and their attendant men, there was not a crowd, and he could listen to his companion's low-voiced confidences without fear of being overheard.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ROSE GIRL'S LITTLE STORY, AND GREAT EYES

HE ordered a lunch which he thought the girl would like, with wine to revive the faculties that he knew must be failing. Then, when she had eaten a little, daintily in spite of her hunger, he encouraged her to talk.

"Mother and I are all alone in the world," she said. "We are Belgian, and live in Brussels, but we have drifted about a good deal, just amusing ourselves. Somehow we never happened to come here until a month ago. Then my mother said one day in Paris, 'Let us go to Monte Carlo. I dreamed last night that I won twenty thousand francs there.' My mother is rather superstitious. We came, and she did win, at first. She was delighted, and believed in her dream, so much that when she began to lose, she went up and up, doubling each time. They call the game she made, 'playing the martingale!'

"She lost all the money we had with us, and telegraphed home for more. Soon, she had sold out every one of our securities. Then she won, and went half mad with the joy and excitement, but the joy didn't last long. She lost all, again – literally, our all. We were penniless. There was nothing left to pay the hotel bill. I went out, and found a *Mont de Pieté*, just beyond the limits

of the Principality; they aren't allowed inside. I pawned all our jewellery, and as we had a great many valuable things, I got several thousand francs. I thought the money would last us until I could find something to do. But, without telling me what she meant to do, mother took it all to the Casino – and – it followed the rest.

"She was so horrified at what she had done, when it was too late, that she wished to kill herself. It was a terrible time for me, but I was so sorry – so sorry for her."

As the girl said this, she looked full into the young man's eyes, with her great, appealing ones. He thought that she must have a wonderfully sweet nature, to have forgiven that horrible, fat old woman, after being subjected to so much undeserved suffering. It was a thousand pities, he said to himself, that a really good sort of girl should be forced to live her life beside a creature of that type, and under such an influence. He had not quite believed in the poor child, at first, perhaps, and because he did believe in her now, he felt poignant remorse for his past injustice.

"What did you do, then?" he asked, honestly absorbed in the story, for he was a generous and warm hearted fellow, who found most of his pleasure, in these latter days, in the help he could give others, to make them happier than he was himself.

"I comforted her as well as I could, but I didn't know what would become of us. Then a lady, who had a room next to mine in the hotel, heard me crying, and was very kind."

"I should think she would have been," interrupted the young

man.

"She told me that, as my mother had lost everything, she had better go to the Direction of the Casino, and get what they call a viatique – money to go away with. So she did ask, though it was a great ordeal to make up her mind to do it; and they gave my mother a thousand francs. Then, you know, she had no right to play in the Rooms again; she was supposed to pay her hotel bill, and leave Monte Carlo. But she gave half the money to a woman she had met in the Rooms, and asked her to put it on six numbers she had dreamed about; she was sure that this time she would win."

"And did she?"

"No. The money was lost. We hadn't enough left to settle our account at the hotel, or to get away from the place, even if there were anywhere to go – when one has no pennies. So my mother begged me to slip into the Rooms, with what was left, and try to get something back. I had been trying when you saw me, with our last louis. Now you know why it seemed so good to see a man I knew, a face I could trust. Now you know why I, who had had such misfortunes, was glad at least to bring you luck."

"It's my turn to bring you some, I think," began the man she could trust; but she stopped him by putting up her plump little white hand.

"If you mean with money, no," she said, with soft decision that was pretty and sad to hear. "If you mean with advice, yes. If you could only get me something to do! You see, they will be turning

us out of our hotel to-morrow. They've let us keep our rooms on, up to now, but for two days they've not given us anything to eat. Of course, it can't go on like this. If it hadn't been for you, I think when I went back to tell my mother that the last louis of the viatique was gone, we would have killed ourselves."

"Great Heaven, you must promise me not to do that," the young man implored.

"I will promise, now, for you have saved me by – caring a little. You do care, really, don't you?"

"I wouldn't have blood in my veins, if I didn't. But – about something for you to do – I must think."

"Are you staying here for some time?" asked the girl.

"I haven't made up my mind."

"I asked because I – I suppose you don't need a secretary, do you? I can write such a good English hand; and I know French and Italian as well as I do German, and your own language. If I could be of use, I would work so hard for you."

"I dare say I shall be needing a secretary after Christmas, indeed, I'm sure I shall," insisted the young man, more and more earnest in his desire to do good. "I have dozens of letters to write every day, and all sorts of odds and ends to keep straight. I could bring the things down to your place and you could help me, if you would. But I'm afraid it would be no end of bother to you."

"I should love it," said the girl, gently.

"Oh, it would be hard work. It would take a lot of your time, and be worth a lot of money."

"Would it really? But you mustn't overpay me. I should be so angry if you did that."

"There's no danger. I'm a good business man, I assure you. I should pay a capable secretary like you – knowing several languages and all that – say forty dollars a week. That's about two hundred francs."

"Wouldn't that be too much?"

"Hardly enough."

"You are so good – so good! But I knew you would be. I wonder if you would think me a very bold girl if I told you something? It's this; I've never forgotten you since those days in Paris. You were different, somehow, from other men I had seen. I thought about you. I had a presentiment that we should meet again. My mother dreamed of numbers to play at roulette. I dreamed of – but oh, I am saying things I ought not to say! Please don't blame me. When you've starved for two days, and not known what to do – unless to die, and then a man comes who is kind, and saves you from terrible things, you can't be as wise and well behaved as at other times."

"Poor child," said the young man.

"It does me good to be called that. But you don't know my name, the name of your new secretary. It is Julie – Julie de Lavalette. My mother is the Comtesse de Lavalette. And you?"

"Oh, I'm plain Hugh Egerton," said the young man.

The girl laughed. "I do not think you are plain Hugh Egerton at all. But perhaps an American girl would not tell you that? Hugh!"

What a nice name. I think it is going to be my favourite name."

She glanced up at him softly, under long lashes, – a thrilling glance; but he missed its radiance, for his own eyes were far away. Hugh had been the favourite name of another girl.

When she saw that look of his, she rose from her chair. "I'm taking too much of your time," she exclaimed, remorsefully. "I must go."

His eyes and thoughts came back to the wearer of pink and roses. Perhaps there had been just a little too much softness and sweetness. It had been wise of her to change the key, and speak of parting.

He paid for the lunch, and tipped the waiters so liberally that they all hoped he would come again often. Then he asked if he might walk with her to the hotel where she and her mother were staying.

"It's down in the Condamine," she hesitated. "We've moved there lately, since the money began to go, and we've had to think of everything. It's rather a long walk from here."

"All the better for me," he answered, and her smile was an appreciation of the compliment.

They sauntered slowly, for there was no haste. Nobody else wanted Hugh Egerton's society, and he began to believe that this girl sincerely did want it. He also believed that he was going to do some real good in the world, not just in the ordinary, obvious way, by throwing about his money, but by being genuinely necessary to someone.

When they had strolled down the hill, and had followed for a time the straight road along the sea on that level plain which is the Condamine, the girl turned up a side street. "We live here," she said, and stopped before a structure of white stucco, rococco decoration, and flimsy balconies. Large gold letters, one or two of which were missing, advertised the house as the Hotel Pension Beau Soleil; and those who ran might read that it would be charitable to describe its accommodation as second rate.

"It is not nice," she went on, with a shrug of her pretty shoulders. "But – it is good to know all the same that we will not be turned out. I have a new heart in my breast, since I left this house a few hours ago – because there is a You in the world."

As she said this, she held out her hand for goodbye, and when he had shaken it warmly, the young man was bold enough to slip off her wrist the little pink leather bag which hung there by its chain.

"Now for that advance on your secretarial work," he said; and taking from his pocket a wad of notes which he had won at the Casino, he stuffed it hastily into the yawning mouth of the bag, while the girl's soft eyes gazed at the sea. Then he closed the spring with a snap, and she let him pass the chain over her hand once more.

"Oh, but it looks very fat," she exclaimed. "Are you sure you counted right?"

"There's a little more there," he said, uncomfortably, "just a little to save the bother of counting here in the street. Don't look

angry. Only the salary part's for you, of course, but the rest – couldn't you just hand it over to your mother, and say, 'Winnings at the Casino'? That's true, you know; it was, every bit. And you needn't say who won it. Besides, if it hadn't been for you, it would have been lost instead of won. It would be a kind of Christmas present for your mother from the Casino, which really owes her a lot more."

The girl shook her head, gently. "I couldn't do that, even for my mother's sake; but I don't misunderstand, now we are such friends. I know how kindly you mean, and though neither mother nor I can accept presents of money, even from dear friends (after all we are of the noblesse!) I'm not going to hurt you by giving the money back, if you will do what I ask of you."

"What is that?" He felt ready to do anything within reason.

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