



REBEKAH BINGS' BLIGHTED LIFE

BY VIRGINIA WOODWARD CLOUD



"THERE'S worrying," said Mrs. Marrow. "Work and worry are like Saul and David; if work kills thousands, worry kills its tens of thousands—and I've minded that it's mostly somebody else's worrying that kills us. Besides, worriers have little except themselves to think of, and workers have other people."

"There was poor Rebekah Bing, who was always ailing. Rebekah was engaged to her cousin Barty Higgins when they were real young; but she took the measles and typhoid, and the doctors said it left her with a chronic spine and a weak heart. So of course she didn't marry Barty, but just staid engaged to him straight along. It was real interesting to hear Rebekah tell about her blighted life."

"We often stopped and talked to Rebekah on our way to a concert or social; it seemed so pitiful she never could go, and she had no other way of hearing the town-talk; for Barty never left her to go anywhere, and Molly was too busy, owing to Rebekah having so much trouble. Many's the time I've seen Rebekah just like a queen with her court around her, all sympathizing; for her ailing so constant made her real important in Monahawk. You see, the chronic spine and the weak heart would take turns and follow each other up, and at each turn Rebekah declared she couldn't live till the next arrived."

"You wouldn't have thought Rebekah Bing was so poorly to look at her. She was real fair, not being exposed to the heat or the cold or to work, like most of us, and she was always dressed pretty and nice, because Molly, her sister, was as spick and span as she could be, and spent all her time nursing Rebekah and making things for her to wear and to eat. Of course a body had to be busy around Rebekah Bing, seeing she had so much happen to her."

"I never heard Molly called pretty—she was real small and thin—except, of course, Ellis Fletcher thought she was. He'd always been a sort of champion of Molly's, and would likely have been a heap more if Molly had had time; for there wasn't much opportunity to notice Molly. But it seems to me that people who forget all about themselves in thinking about others have a sort of unseen prettiness that's got to be found out. Folks thought Rebekah pretty. She had brown eyes and a good color, and her face never got thin, which was natural, seeing she couldn't take exercise. Rebekah never fell off, even after one of her dying spells. I always felt like I'd been to an exhibition, or away from home, after one of Rebekah's dying spells. Of course it was natural they shouldn't try my nerves as they did Molly's. I being an old friend, Molly mostly sent over for me when Rebekah was dying."

"I remember one day old Barty came running over and said for me to come quick, that Miss Rebekah was dying. When I got there Mr. Plett, the preacher, was coming away."

"Sister Bing's mighty bad," said he.

"Which is it?" said I.

"The weak heart," said he; "and she says she surely can't pull through this time," said he.

"Molly was on the steps, crying. She followed me up to Rebekah's room, and, sure enough, there lay Rebekah with her eyes closed like she was unconscious."

"She was taken at midnight, and now the doctor cannot bring her around," whispered Molly, wiping her eyes.

"Had any appetite for the things we sent over from the festival?" said I.

"And Molly allowed that Rebekah had done right well the evening before with crab salad, ice-cream, and lemonade. 'Oh, Mis' Marrow, I can't live without Becky! I've dreaded the time for so long, and now it's come—it's come!' cried poor little Molly."

"Well, if it's come we musn't complain," said I, with an eye on Rebekah's eyelids.

"I can't live without her! Oh, why doesn't Barty come?" whispered Molly, wringing her hands.

"Well, a man's a man," said I, looking steady at Rebekah's eyelids. "Miss Sterrett gave a big crabbing party down on our wharf this morning. I guess Barty's—"

"He isn't!" said Rebekah Bing, opening her eyes wide; "you know he isn't. Mis' Marrow! Barty Higgins is coming here to me as fast as his feet can carry him!"

"Oh, she's come round!—she's come round!" cried poor little Molly, on her knees beside Rebekah.

"Now, Rebekah, don't you excite yourself," said I, "or you'll be dying again. I was just about to say that Barty isn't like the rest of them, for I met him riding like the wind down for Dr. Harley, the new doctor at Deal's, who knows so much about the heart."

"Oh, Becky, Becky! you won't die this time, will you?" sobbed little Molly.

"I won't have the new doctor," whispered Rebekah; "but maybe if I had a little nourishment—"

"Molly flew to get it, and when I left Rebekah was sitting up in bed eating toast and jelly. I met Barty at the door, panting hard. Behind him was the new doctor."

"Is she alive?" gasped Barty, leaning against the door.

"Eating toast and jelly," said I.

"He broke by me up to Rebekah, and Molly came down to see the doctor."

"Is this the patient?" he said, eying Molly.

"No, indeed; that's just Molly," said I, noticing that Molly did look right small and peaked. Then Molly explained nicely that after such an attack her sister didn't feel like seeing a new doctor, and he went out; but at the door he looked back at me and nodded to Molly."

"It wouldn't hurt her to eat some of her sister's toast and jelly," said he.

"A few days afterwards Molly came across to me in despair. Rebekah had a dreadful case of boils on her neck, and it had brought on hysterics. Molly had been up all night fanning her and keeping ice to her head, and now Rebekah had fever."

"She'll never stand it, Mis' Marrow, never!" said Molly. "It does seem like poor Becky might have been spared this, she's had so much!"

"And what's that all on your face and hands?" said I.

"Nothing but bee stings," said Molly. "My bees swarmed yesterday and stung me."

"And you haven't done a thing for it yet?" said I.

"Oh, it's nothing, and I haven't thought of it, Becky's

had a dying spell from dropsy, and insisted upon sending for Mr. Bentz, the undertaker, to find out what sort of a plate he'd made for her. Mr. Bentz had been summoned so often that he'd made all ready for Rebekah, and certainly did take an interest in it. But when she found out he'd left a space for her age, she was so put out that it sometimes brought her around. Excitement will do it sometimes, they tell me. After that Molly was suddenly taken sick—nothing except nerves, Dr. Harley said, and that she needed a change. We sent for him, Barty and I, for Rebekah was in bed with hysterics because there was nobody to take care of her. So the next day the doctor sent Molly away, though she fought hard not to go, and the night after she went I took care of Rebekah."

"She looked so bright and well that I said, 'Becky, you're getting real stout,' but she declared that it wasn't solid flesh, but dropsy, and that her heart would surely fail soon. Well, though it was a heap of responsibility, seeing Molly was away, I thought I'd try a new treatment, as nothing else had done any good in all these years, so I said:

"Oh, I guess not, Rebekah. You just need diet, that's all."

"But, my! It drove her into a sort of trembling faint, and I was right frightened."

"I'll send for Dr. Harley," said I.

"I won't have him! I won't have him! You'll starve me to death, between you!" gasped Rebekah. "Send for Barty! I want Barty to come to hear my last wishes!"

"But I didn't send for Barty; for I'd kept an eye on Barty Higgins for some time. He'd grown to look real old and worn out with anxiety. So that morning I asked

him to do me a favor, saying that I would explain to Rebekah—which I did when the proper time arrived, though it wasn't for a good while afterwards."

"There was a pretty young girl boarding with me from down at Cadar Cove, and I up and asked Barty Higgins to take her over to Mis' Sterrett's dance that evening. He was mighty surprised and doubtful at first; then I persuaded him, and he didn't like to say no. So when Rebekah kept worrying me I said:

"Well, Becky, if you must know, Barty is down at Mis' Sterrett's about this time, dancing with Kitty Bell."

"Dancing with Kitty Bell!" she says, sitting up in bed, and a red spot breaking out on each cheek."

"It's the truth, Becky," said I; "and if it's the first dance he's had for fifteen years, I guess it won't be the last, for Kitty Bell's a lovely dancer," said I, "and as bright as a bird."

"You can give me my supper, Mis' Marrow," says Rebekah, suddenly; "I feel better."

"When she'd eaten her supper, she got up and curled her hair before the glass. But Barty didn't come that night. The next day, when he did come, Rebekah was sitting on the porch dressed in the new blue lawn Molly made her before she went away. She had her hair curled,

too, and I minded that she knew enough not to mention Kitty Bell, though I don't believe she ever quite forgave me."

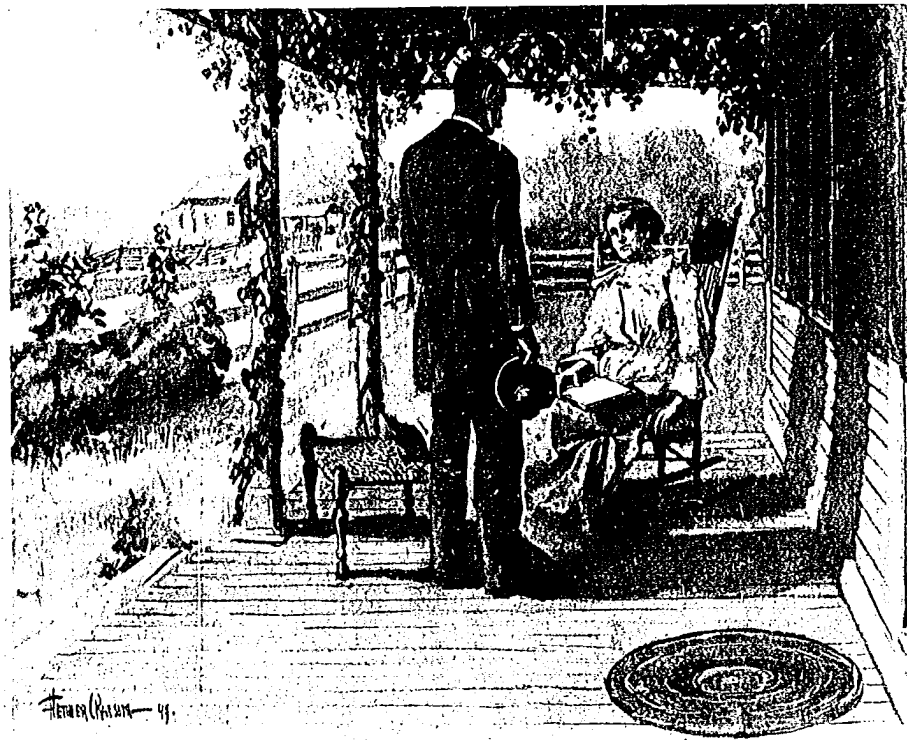
"Poor Barty! He looked like heaven had opened for him that day. He didn't know what to make of Rebekah. The truth was he'd made a real idol of Rebekah Bing, and seemed to see her just as he wanted to see her. I suppose that's the way with love, mostly."

"Poor Rebekah! I went up there to the funeral soon afterwards. It was real impressive. Rebekah?"

"Why, bless you, Rebekah Bing isn't dead!" said Mrs. Marrow. "Why, she's married and weighs a hundred and ninety pounds! And it isn't dropsy, either! 'Twas Molly that died."

"Barty? Why, you see, as soon as little Molly came back and died—'twas nerves, Doctor Harley said. But Ellis Fletcher he went on dreadful; he said it was Rebekah. Why, Rebekah hadn't anybody to take care of her, so she got well. You see, there wasn't anything else for her to do—poor Rebekah! Then she up and broke her engagement off with Barty. Seemed like Barty was 'most an old man then, and needed care himself, and, like Rebekah, was starting in fresh. But, if you believe it, he took it so hard that he went South and died of swamp fever—so they said. He'd made a kind of angel in his mind out of Rebekah. Maybe it was just as well he never learned better. But she got the life-insurance."

"Rebekah Bing married Mr. Bentz, the undertaker, after he came into some money. He said he couldn't do less than marry Miss Bing, seeing she had always been such an encouragement to him in his business."



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been so bad," said Molly. "Never mind me, Mis' Marrow, but come and see if you can do anything for Becky."

"I went over to the dark room where Rebekah Bing lay moaning, and opened the shutters, although she cried out; for 'twas hot enough in there to give any one a fever."

"Has Barty come?" she whispered, like she was faint."

"Shall I send again, Mis' Marrow?" asked little Molly, trembling. "Haden't I better send quick?"

"Well, I never knew a body to die of a few bee stings, but maybe Rebekah could; I don't know," said I.

"It isn't bee stings; it's inflammation," moaned Rebekah. "You don't know how I felt all night!"

"No, I don't," said I. "If I had everybody else's feelings on top of my own, 'twould be time to talk of dying."

"Send for Barty!" moaned Rebekah.

"Rebekah took Barty real hard, just like the bee stings. They were engaged most twenty years, all told, and it was a heap more variety for Barty than if he'd been engaged to a livelier person, for he was always afraid of losing her, and it made her more valuable. 'Most every night Rebekah bade him good-by, lest she shouldn't live till morning. Molly said it was real solemn and impressive and like a ghost story, and sometimes Barty was moved to tears. It was a queer way to hold a man. I've known them to be held in many ways besides by love, but Rebekah's dying spells answered as well, and were more exciting."

"By-and-by they got to be more frequent, and Barty was likely to be sent for at any time, though it did seem to me that Rebekah never looked so well; but maybe that wasn't natural, for Molly said Rebekah knew she was getting the dropsy. Soon after, sure enough, Rebekah

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