

Tucholsky Wagner Zola Scott
Turgenev Wallace Fonatne Sydon Freud Schlegel
Twain Walther von der Vogelweide Fouqué Friedrich II. von Preußen
Weber Freiligrath Frey
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas
Fehrs Faber Flaubert Eliasberg Eliot Zweig Ebner Eschenbach
Feuerbach Maximilian I. von Habsburg Fock Ewald Vergil
Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London
Mendelssohn Balzac Shakespeare Rathenau Dostojewski Ganghofer
Trackl Stevenson Lichtenberg Doyle Gjellerup
Mommsen Thoma Tolstoi Lenz Hambruch Droste-Hülshoff
Dach Thoma von Arnim Hägele Hanrieder Hauptmann Humboldt
Karrillon Reuter Verne Rousseau Hagen Hauff Baudelaire Gautier
Garschin Defoe Hebbel Hegel Kussmaul Herder
Damaschke Descartes Schopenhauer George
Wolfram von Eschenbach Darwin Dickens Grimm Jerome Rilke Bebel Proust
Bronner Campe Horváth Aristoteles Voltaire Federer Herodot
Bismarck Vigny Gengenbach Barlach Heine Grillparzer Georgy
Storm Casanova Lessing Tersteegen Gilm Gryphius
Chamberlain Langbein Lafontaine Iffland Sokrates
Brentano Strachwitz Claudius Schiller Bellamy Schilling Kralik Gibbon Tschchow
Katharina II. von Rußland Gerstäcker Raabe Gleim Vulpius
Löns Hesse Hoffmann Gogol Morgenstern Goedicke
Luther Heym Hofmannsthal Klee Hölty Kleist
Roth Heyse Klopstock Puschkin Homer Mörike Musil
Luxemburg La Roche Horaz Kraus
Machiavelli Kierkegaard Kraft Kraus Moltke
Navarra Aurel Musset Lamprecht Kind Kirchhoff Hugo
Nestroy Marie de France Laotse Ipsen Liebknecht
Nietzsche Nansen Lassalle Gorki Klett Leibniz Ringelntz
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Unleavened Bread

Robert Grant

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UNLEAVENED

BREAD

By Robert Grant

*Author of *The Bachelor's Christmas*, etc.*

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UNLEAVENED BREAD

BOOK I.

THE EMANCIPATION

CHAPTER I.

Babcock and Selma White were among the last of the wedding guests to take their departure. It was a brilliant September night with a touch of autumn vigor in the atmosphere, which had not been without its effect on the company, who had driven off in gay spirits, most of them in hay-carts or other vehicles capable of carrying a party. Their songs and laughter floated back along the winding country road. Selma, comfortable in her wraps and well tucked about with a rug, leaned back contentedly in the chaise, after the goodbyes had been said, to enjoy the glamour of the full moon. They were seven miles from home and she was in no hurry to get there. Neither festivities nor the undisguised devotion of a city young man were common in her life. Consideration she had been used to from a child, and she knew herself to be tacitly acknowledged the smartest girl in Westfield, but perhaps for that very reason she had held aloof from manhood until now. At least no youth in her neighborhood had ever impressed her as her equal. Neither did Babcock so impress her; but he was different from the rest. He was not shy and unexpressive; he was buoyant and self-reliant, and yet he seemed to appreciate her quality none the less.

They had met about a dozen times, and on the last six of these occasions he had come from Benham, ten miles to her uncle's farm, obviously to visit her. The last two times her Aunt Farley had made him spend the night, and it had been arranged that he would drive her in the Farley chaise to Clara Morse's wedding. A seven-mile drive is apt to promote or kill the germs of intimacy, and on the way over she had been conscious of enjoying herself. Scrutiny of Clara's choice had been to the advantage of her own cavalier. The bridegroom had seemed to her what her Aunt Farley would call a

mouse-in-the-cheese young man. Whereas Babcock had been the life of the affair.

She had been teaching now in Wilton for more than a year. When, shortly after her father's death, she had obtained the position of school teacher, it seemed to her that at last the opportunity had come to display her capabilities, and at the same time to fulfil her aspirations. But the task of grounding a class of small children in the rudiments of simple knowledge had already begun to pall and to seem unsatisfying. Was she to spend her life in this? And if not, the next step, unless it were marriage, was not obvious. Not that she mistrusted her ability to shine in any educational capacity, but neither Wilton nor the neighboring Westfield offered better, and she was conscious of a lack of influential friends in the greater world, which was embodied for her in Benham. Benham was a western city of these United States, with an eastern exposure; a growing, bustling city according to rumor, with an eager population restless with new ideas and stimulating ambitions. So at least Selma thought of it, and though Boston and New York and a few other places were accepted by her as authoritative, she accepted them, as she accepted Shakespeare, as a matter of course and so far removed from her immediate outlook as almost not to count. But Benham with its seventy-five thousand inhabitants and independent ways was a fascinating possibility. Once established there the world seemed within her grasp, including Boston. Might it not be that Benham, in that it was newer, was nearer to truth and more truly American than that famous city? She was not prepared to believe this an absurdity.

At least the mental atmosphere of Westfield and even of the somewhat less solemn Wilton suggested this apotheosis of the adjacent city to be reasonable. Westfield had stood for Selma as a society of serious though simple souls since she could first remember and had been one of them. Not that she arrogated to her small native town any unusual qualities of soul or mind in distinction from most other American communities, but she regarded it as inferior in point of view to none, and typical of the best national characteristics. She had probably never put into words the reasons of her confidence, but her daily consciousness was permeated with them. To be an American meant to be more keenly alive to the responsibility

of life than any other citizen of civilization, and to be an American woman meant to be something finer, cleverer, stronger, and purer than any other daughter of Eve. Under the agreeable but sobering influence of this faith she had grown to womanhood, and the heroic deeds of the civil war had served to intensify a belief, the truth of which she had never heard questioned. Her mission in life had promptly been recognized by her as the development of her soul along individual lines, but until the necessity for a choice had arisen she had been content to contemplate a little longer. Now the world was before her, for she was twenty-three and singularly free from ties. Her mother had died when she was a child. Her father, the physician of the surrounding country, a man of engaging energy with an empirical education and a speculative habit of mind, had been the companion of her girlhood. During the last few years since his return from the war an invalid from a wound, her care for him had left her time for little else.

No more was Babcock in haste to reach home; and after the preliminary dash from the door into the glorious night he suffered the farm-horse to pursue its favorite gait, a deliberate jog. He knew the creature to be docile, and that he could bestow his attention on his companion without peril to her. His own pulses were bounding. He was conscious of having made the whirligig of time pass merrily for the company by his spirits and jolly quips, and that in her presence, and he was groping for an appropriate introduction to the avowal he had determined to make. He would never have a better opportunity than this, and it had been his preconceived intention to take advantage of it if all went well. All had gone well and he was going to try. She had been kind coming over; and had seemed to listen with interest as he told her about himself: and somehow he had felt less distant from her. He was not sure what she would say, for he realized that she was above him. That was one reason why he admired her so. She symbolized for him refinement, poetry, art, the things of the spirit—things from which in the same whirligig of time he had hitherto been cut off by the vicissitudes of the varnish business; but the value of which he was not blind to. How proud he would be of such a wife! How he would strive and labor for her! His heart was in his mouth and trembled on his lip as he thought of the

possibility. What a joy to be sitting side by side with her under this splendid moon! He would speak and know his fate.

"Isn't it a lovely night?" murmured Selma appreciatively. "There they go," she added, indicating the disappearance over the brow of a hill of the last of the line of vehicles of the rest of the party, whose songs had come back fainter and fainter.

"I don't care. Do you?" He snuggled toward her a very little.

"I guess they won't think I'm lost," she said, with a low laugh.

"What d'you suppose your folks would say if you *were* lost? I mean if I were to run away with you and didn't bring you back?" There was a nervous ring in the guffaw which concluded his question.

"My friends wouldn't miss me much; at least they'd soon get over the shock; but I might miss myself, Mr. Babcock."

Selma was wondering why it was that she rather liked being alone with this man, big enough, indeed, to play the monster, yet half school-boy, but a man who had done well in his calling. He must be capable; he could give her a home in Benham; and it was plain that he loved her.

"I'll tell you something," he said, eagerly, ignoring her suggestion. "I'd like to run away with you and be married to-night, Selma. That's what I'd like, and I guess you won't. But it's the burning wish of my heart that you'd marry me some time. I want you to be my wife. I'm a rough fellow along-side of you, Selma, but I'd do well by you; I would. I'm able to look after you, and you shall have all you want. There's a nice little house building now in Benham. Say the word and I'll buy it for us to-morrow. I'm crazy after you, Selma."

The rein was dangling, and Babcock reached his left arm around the waist of his lady-love. He had now and again made the same demonstration with others jauntily, but this was a different matter. She was not to be treated like other women. She was a goddess to him, even in his ardor, and he reached gingerly. Selma did not wholly withdraw from the spread of his trembling arm, though this was the first man who had ever ventured to lay a finger on her.

"I'd have to give up my school," she said.

"They could get another teacher."

"*Could* they?"

"Not one like you. You see I'm clumsy, but I'm crazy for you, Selma." Emboldened by the obvious feebleness of her opposition, he broadened his clutch and drew her toward him. "Say you will, sweetheart."

This time she pulled herself free and sat up in the chaise. "Would you let me do things?" she asked after a moment.

"Do things," faltered Babcock. What could she mean? She had told him on the way over that her mother had chosen her name from a theatrical playbill, and it passed through his unsophisticated brain that she might be thinking of the stage.

"Yes, do something worth while. Be somebody. I've had the idea I could, if I ever got the chance." Her hands were folded in her lap; there was a wrapt expression on her thin, nervous face, and a glitter in her keen eyes, which were looking straight at the moon, as though they would outstare it in brilliancy.

"You shall be anything you like, if you'll only marry me. What is it you're wishing to be?"

"I don't know exactly. It isn't anything especial yet. It's the whole thing. I thought I might find it in my school, but the experience so far hasn't been—satisfying."

"Troublesome little brats!"

"No, I dare say the fault's in me. If I went to Benham to live it would be different. Benham must be interesting—inspiring."

"There's plenty of go there. You'd like it, and people would think lots of you."

"I'd try to make them." She turned and looked at him judicially, but with a softened expression. Her profile in her exalted mood had suggested a beautiful, but worried archangel; her full face seemed less this and wore much of the seductive embarrassment of sex. To Babcock she seemed the most entrancing being he had ever seen. "Would you really like to have me come?"

He gave a hoarse ejaculation, and encircling her eagerly with his strong grasp pressed his lips upon her cheek. "Selma! darling! angel! I'm the happiest man alive."

"You mustn't do that — yet," she said protestingly.

"Yes, I must; I'm yours, and you're mine, — mine. Aren't you, sweetheart? There's no harm in a kiss."

She had to admit to herself that it was not very unpleasant after all to be held in the embrace of a sturdy lover, though she had never intended that their relations should reach this stage of familiarity so promptly. She had known, of course, that girls were to look for endearments from those whom they promised to marry, but her person had hitherto been so sacred to man and to herself that it was difficult not to shrink a little from what was taking place. This then was love, and love was, of course, the sweetest thing in the world. That was one of the truths which she had accepted as she had accepted the beauty of Shakespeare, as something not to be disputed, yet remote. He was a big, affectionate fellow, and she must make up her mind to kiss him. So she turned her face toward him and their lips met eagerly, forestalling the little peck which she had intended. She let her head fall back at his pressure on to his shoulder, and gazed up at the moon.

"Are you happy, Selma?" he asked, giving her a fond, firm squeeze.

"Yes, Lewis."

She could feel his frame throb with joy at the situation as she uttered his name.

"We'll be married right away. That's if you're willing. My business is going first-rate and, if it keeps growing for the next year as it has for the past two, you'll be rich presently. When shall it be, Selma?"

"You're in dreadful haste. Well, I'll promise to give the selectmen notice to-morrow that they must find another teacher."

"Because the one they have now is going to become Mrs. Lewis J. Babcock. I'm the luckiest fellow, hooray! in creation. See here," he

added, taking her hand, "I guess a ring wouldn't look badly there—a real diamond, too. Pretty little fingers."

She sighed gently, by way of response. It was comfortable nestling in the hollow of his shoulder, and a new delightful experience to be hectored with sweetness in this way. How round and bountiful the moon looked. She was tired of her present life. What was coming would be better. Her opportunity was at hand to show the world what she was made of.

"A real diamond, and large at that," he repeated, gazing down at her, and then, as though the far away expression in her eyes suggested kinship with the unseen and the eternal, he said, admiringly but humbly, "It must be grand to be clever like you, Selma. I'm no good at that. But if loving you will make up for it, I'll go far, little woman."

"What I know of that I like, and—and if some day, I can make you proud of me, so much the better," said Selma.

"Proud of you? You are an angel, and you know it."

She closed her eyes and sighed again. Even the bright avenues of fame, which her keen eyes had traversed through the golden moon, paled before this tribute from the lips of real flesh and blood. What woman can withstand the fascination of a lover's faith that she is an angel? If a man is fool enough to believe it, why undeceive him? And if he is so sure of it, may it even not be so? Selma was content to have it so, especially as the assertion did not jar with her own prepossessions; and thus they rode home in the summer night in the mutual contentment of a betrothal.

CHAPTER II.

The match was thoroughly agreeable to Mrs. Farley, Selma's aunt and nearest relation, who with her husband presided over a flourishing poultry farm in Wilton. She was an easy-going, friendly spirit, with a sharp but not wide vision, who did not believe that a likelier fellow than Lewis Babcock would come wooing were her niece to wait a lifetime. He was hearty, comical, and generous, and was said to be making money fast in the varnish business. In short, he seemed to her an admirable young man, with a stock of common-

sense and high spirits eminently serviceable for a domestic venture. How full of fun he was, to be sure! It did her good to behold the tribute his appetite paid to the buckwheat cakes with cream and other tempting viands she set before him—a pleasing contrast to Selma's starveling diet—and the hearty smack with which he enforced his demands upon her own cheeks as his mother-in-law apparent, argued an affectionate disposition. Burly, rosy-cheeked, good-natured, was he not the very man to dispel her niece's vagaries and turn the girl's morbid cleverness into healthy channels?

Selma, therefore, found nothing but encouragement in her choice at home; so by the end of another three months they were made man and wife, and had moved into that little house in Benham which had attracted Babcock's eye. Benham, as has been indicated, was in the throes of bustle and self-improvement. Before the war it had been essentially unimportant. But the building of a railroad through the town and the discovery of oil wells in its neighborhood had transformed it in a twinkling into an active and spirited centre. Selma's new house was on the edge of the city, in the van of real estate progress, one of a row of small but ambitious-looking dwellings, over the dark yellow clapboards of which the architect had let his imagination run rampant in scrolls and flourishes. There was fancy colored glass in a sort of rose-window over the front door, and lozenges of fancy glass here and there in the facade. Each house had a little grass-plot, which Babcock in his case had made appurtenant to a metal stag, which seemed to him the finishing touch to a cosey and ornamental home. He had done his best and with all his heart, and the future was before them.

Babcock found himself radiant over the first experiences of married life. It was just what he had hoped, only better. His imagination in entertaining an angel had not been unduly literal, and it was a constant delight and source of congratulation to him to reflect over his pipe on the lounge after supper that the charming piece of flesh and blood sewing or reading demurely close by was the divinity of his domestic hearth. There she was to smile at him when he came home at night and enable him to forget the cares and dross of the varnish business. Her presence across the table added a new zest to every meal and improved his appetite. In marrying he had expected to cut loose from his bachelor habits, and he asked for nothing bet-

ter than to spend every evening alone with Selma, varied by an occasional evening at the theatre, and a drive out to the Farleys' now and then for supper. This, with the regular Sunday service at Rev. Henry Glynn's church, rounded out the weeks to his perfect satisfaction. He was conscious of feeling that the situation did not admit of improvement, for though, when he measured himself with Selma, Babcock was humble-minded, a cheerful and uncritical optimism was the ruling characteristic of his temperament. With health, business fortune, and love all on his side, it was natural to him to regard his lot with complacency. Especially as to all appearances, this was the sort of thing Selma liked, also. Presently, perhaps, there would be a baby, and then their cup of domestic happiness would be overflowing. Babcock's long ungratified yearning for the things of the spirit were fully met by these cosy evenings, which he would have been glad to continue to the crack of doom. To smoke and sprawl and read a little, and exchange chit-chat, was poetry enough for him. So contented was he that his joy was apt to find an outlet in ditties and whistling—he possessed a slightly tuneful, rollicking knack at both—a proceeding which commonly culminated in his causing Selma to sit beside him on the sofa and be made much of, to the detriment of her toilette.

As for the bride, so dazing were the circumstances incident to the double change of matrimony and adaptation to city life, that her judgment was in suspension. Yet though she smiled and sewed demurely, she was thinking. The yellow clapboarded house and metal stag, and a maid-of-all-work at her beck and call, were gratifying at the outset and made demands upon her energies. Selma's position in her father's house had been chiefly ornamental and social. She had been his companion and nurse, had read to him and argued with him, but the mere household work had been performed by an elderly female relative who recognized that her mind was bent on higher things. Nevertheless, she had never doubted that when the time arrived to show her capacity as a housewife, she would be more than equal to the emergency. Assuredly she would, for one of the distinguishing traits of American womanhood was the ability to perform admirably with one's own hand many menial duties and yet be prepared to shine socially with the best. Still the experience was not quite so easy as she expected; even harassing

and mortifying. Fortunately, Lewis was more particular about quantity than quality where the table was concerned; and, after all, food and domestic details were secondary considerations in a noble outlook. It would have suited her never to be obliged to eat, and to be able to leave the care of the house to the hired girl; but that being out of the question, it became incumbent on her to make those obligations as simple as possible. However, the possession of a new house and gay fittings was an agreeable realization. At home everything had been upholstered in black horse-hair, and regard for material appearances had been obscured for her by the tension of her introspective tendencies. Lewis was very kind, and she had no reason to reproach herself as yet for her choice. He had insisted that she should provide herself with an ample and more stylish wardrobe, and though the invitation had interested her but mildly, the effect of shrewdly-made and neatly fitting garments on her figure had been a revelation. Like the touch of a man's hand, fine raiment had seemed to her hitherto almost repellent, but it was obvious now that anything which enhanced her effectiveness could not be dismissed as valueless. To arrive at definite conclusions in regard to her social surroundings was less easy for Selma. Benham, in its rapid growth, had got beyond the level simplicity of Westfield and Wilton, and was already confronted by the stern realities which baffle the original ideal in every American city. We like as a nation to cherish the illusion that extremes of social condition do not exist even in our large communities, and that the plutocrat and the sales-lady, the learned professions and the proletariat associate on a common basis of equal virtue, intelligence, and culture. And yet, although Benham was a comparatively young and an essentially American city, there were very marked differences in all these respects in its community.

Topographically speaking the starting point of Benham was its water-course. Twenty years before the war Benham was merely a cluster of frame houses in the valley of the limpid, peaceful river Nye. At that time the inhabitants drank of the Nye taken at a point below the town, for there was a high fall which would have made the drawing of water above less convenient. This they were doing when Selma came to Benham, although every man's hand had been raised against the Nye, which was the nearest, and hence for a

community in hot haste, the most natural receptacle for dyestuffs, ashes and all the outflow from woollen mills, pork factories and oil yards, and it ran the color of glistening bean soup. From time to time, as the city grew, the drawing point had been made a little lower where the stream had regained a portion of its limpidity, and no one but wiseacres and busybodies questioned its wholesomeness. Benham at that time was too preoccupied and too proud of its increasing greatness to mistrust its own judgment in matters hygienic, artistic, and educational. There came a day later when the river rose against the city, and an epidemic of typhoid fever convinced a reluctant community that there were some things which free-born Americans did not know intuitively. Then there were public meetings and a general indignation movement, and presently, under the guidance of competent experts, Lake Mohunk, seven miles to the north, was secured as a reservoir. Just to show how the temper of the times has changed, and how sophisticated in regard to hygienic matters some of the good citizens of Benham in these latter days have become, it is worthy of mention that, though competent chemists declare Lake Mohunk to be free from contamination, there are those now who use so-called mineral spring-waters in preference; notably Miss Flagg, the daughter of old Joel Flagg, once the miller and, at the date when the Babcocks set up their household gods, one of the oil magnates of Benham. He drank the bean colored Nye to the day of his death and died at eighty; but she carries a carboy of spring-water with her personal baggage wherever she travels, and is perpetually solicitous in regard to the presence of arsenic in wall-papers into the bargain.

Verily, the world has wagged apace in Benham since Selma first looked out at her metal stag and the surrounding landscape. Ten years later the Benham Home Beautifying Society took in hand the Nye and those who drained into it, and by means of garbage consumers, disinfectants, and filters and judiciously arranged shrubbery converted its channel and banks into quite a respectable citizens' paradise. But even at that time the industries on either bank of the Nye, which flowed from east to west, were forcing the retail shops and the residences further and further away. To illustrate again from the Flagg family, just before the war Joel Flagg built a modest house less than a quarter of a mile from the southerly bank

of the river, expecting to end his days there, and was accused by contemporary censors of an intention to seclude himself in magnificent isolation. About this time he had yielded to the plea of his family, that every other building in the street had been given over to trade, and that they were stranded in a social Sahara of factories. So like the easy going yet soaring soul that he was, he had moved out two miles to what was known as the River Drive, where the Nye accomplishes a broad sweep to the south. There an ambitious imported architect, glad of such an opportunity to speculate in artistic effects, had built for him a conglomeration of a feudal castle and an old colonial mansion in all the grisly bulk of signal failure.

Considering our ideals, it is a wonder that no one has provided a law forbidding the erection of all the architecturally attractive, or sumptuous houses in one neighborhood. It ought not to be possible in a republic for such a state of affairs to exist as existed in Benham. That is to say all the wealth and fashion of the city lay to the west of Central Avenue, which was so literally the dividing line that if a Benhamite were referred to as living on that street the conventional inquiry would be "On which side?" And if the answer were "On the east," the inquirer would be apt to say "Oh!" with a cold inflection which suggested a ban. No Benhamite has ever been able to explain precisely why it should be more creditable to live on one side of the same street than on the other, but I have been told by clever women, who were good Americans besides, that this is one of the subtle truths which baffle the Gods and democracies alike. Central Avenue has long ago been appropriated by the leading retail dry-goods shops, huge establishments where everything from a set of drawing-room furniture to a hair-pin can be bought under a single roof; but at that time it was the social artery. Everything to the west was new and assertive; then came the shops and the business centre; and to the east were Tom, Dick, and Harry, Michael, Isaac and Pietro, the army of citizens who worked in the mills, oil yards, and pork factories. And to the north, across the river, on the further side of more manufacturing establishments, was Poland, so-called—a settlement of the Poles—to reach whom now there are seven bridges of iron. There were but two bridges then, one of wood, and journeys across them had not yet been revealed to philanthropic young women eager to do good.