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Lancaster Intelligencer.

WEDNESDAY EVENING, FEB. 4, 1880.

Quiet Ruth; or, Given Back.

She was very quiet, my friend Ruth Earle. Repose was in every line of her graceful form and every feature of her pretty face. The soft waving hair, brown in the shadow and flecked with pale golden gleams when the sun shone upon it; the solemn blue eyes, the straight white brow—all very quiet to intensity. She never blushed, or trembled, or went into ecstatics of admiration, or fear or fun; her smile rose on her face and lit it, as the full moon does the sky on a still summer night, and every tone of her voice was low and musical. Some called her cold, but I who knew her so well would have laughed at them. In one sentence she could embody the sentiments another girl would have spent an hour in delineating. In one glance she could reveal a perfect tempest of joy, or love, or scorn; but the glances were rare, and the words rarer, but Ruth's heart was usually a sealed casket to all about her. A quiet interest and sympathy in others' weal and woe, a peaceful sort of happiness—only those were on the surface and the torrent of emotion rolled on silently beneath.

Why, of all the men on earth, Ruth should have given her heart to my cousin, Charley Campbell, I could not guess. How he—fiery and emotional to a degree, acting on impulse altogether, loving everything that dashed and glittered and made a noise, adoring martial music and passionate poetry, and always smitten by talkative, black-haired, waltzing, coquetting belles—ever fell in love with quiet Ruth Earle was still a stranger problem. When one fine August evening he bounced into our parlor, where I was sitting alone, and informed me without parley or preface, that he was engaged to Ruth, I in my astonishment, exclaimed: "I should as soon have imagined a mad bull engaged to a ring dove?" and was very sorry afterwards, for it was such a foolish, singular speech. Still, it did describe my feelings exactly.

Everyone wondered. Young girls "wondered what he could see in such a quiet girl;" young gentlemen "wondered how she could like such a wild scapegrace." But when, at last, she came to me one day, and, with both hands in mine, said, "Mary, you do not know how dear he is to me—he is my life," I wondered no longer, for I knew that Ruth had given him one of those irresistible, unconscious glances of hers, and shot him through the heart.

I think they were very happy all that bright autumn; and when the winter came, the quiet contentment of Ruth's face deepened, and every evening he was at her side, reading, or singing, or talking to her in soft loving whispers. Was she taming down my wild cousin? Could mortal woman do such a seemingly impossible thing? Were all the wild oats sown—all the scrapes over? It seemed so.

The careless boy was maturing into the high-bred man; passionate and impulsive still, but with better aims and higher principles.

The winter rolled away, the bright spring came, and when the fragrant apple blossoms were upon the trees, Ruth told me that the day was appointed for her bridal, and we rode out together one morning to purchase satin, and lace, and muslin, for the bride's attire. Going home together with the parcels stowed away in the bottom of the vehicle, we met Cousin Charley, his cheeks aglow and his eyes dancing with suppressed merriment. He waved his hand to us and we paused.

"Take me in, won't you," he said, pleadingly. "I have been to call upon you and of course I found you 'not at home.' You have a seat for me, I know."

I signified my approval, and he jumped in and seated himself beside Ruth.

"The 'Petral' came in to-day," he said, as we drove along. Did you hear the guns? She is a fine vessel, just from India, with a set of the yellowest passengers you ever saw. Liver complaint is as common among them as among French geese, and pepper is the chief article of their diet. Such tempers as they have, too; it would puzzle Ruth herself to keep quiet among them."

"How do you know so much about them?" I enquired.

"Oh, I've been to breakfast with one of their number," replied Charley; "an old nabob who is as rich as he is ugly, and who has the handsomest wife——by the way, an old schoolmate of yours, Mary."

"Who is she?" I asked.

He replied by another question—"Do you remember Kate Glynn?"

"Kate Glynn? Yes. Is she the nabob's wife?"

"Of course she is. I met her coming off the boat this morning. She knew me at once. We had a desperate flirtation long ago. She is one of the red-hot, madcap girls I used to like before I knew my snowbird here, and my face remained in her memory. She introduced me to her husband, and he invited me to breakfast. I revenged myself for the spices which burned my tongue, by burning the old fellow's heart with jealousy, and talking mysteriously of old times. He did not invite me to call again; but she did, and I am going."

"Charles Campbell, I am ashamed of you," I said.

"Oh, it's all nonsense, Mary," said Charley. "Here is my safeguard;" and his arm stole about Ruth's shoulder so decidedly, that I was obliged to change places with him immediately on account of the publicity of the street.

Throughout that ride he seemed to overflow with merriment. He imitated the old man's manner, his conversation and his frown; told extravagant stories of the lady's smiles and attentions, and made us laugh by a description of the saucer eyes of the nabob's black servant who waited behind his chair. Ruth smiled placidly upon him all the while, and seemed perfectly contented with his account of the flirtation.

"What shall I do when you elope with the nabob's lady?" she said, as we alighted.

"Follow me and shoot me through the head with a revolver," answered Charley.

"It would be easier to elope myself with the nabob," returned Ruth, quietly. "You would not be worth shooting."

"There spoke Ruth," laughed her lover. "You would never break your heart over me, snow-bird." And, somehow, a sort of dissatisfied tone was in his voice, as he uttered the word—at least, I imagined there was; but it was gone before he had handed us out of the carriage.

We working on the bridal outfit slowly. Day by day the dainty garments grew beneath our fingers. We sat together in a little quiet room, looking gardenward, which Ruth called her own. The window opened inward, and a red rose vine without fluttered its leaves and fragrance in upon us. Soft lace was looped about it and about the bed. The floor was covered with white matting. There was a great "sleepy hollow," or a chair, in one corner, and a marble stand against the wall. Over the mantel hung the picture of a sleeping child. It was a quiet room, just fit for quiet Ruth, and as she sat in the soft shadow of the fine branches, sending the needle in and out of the snowy muslin, and humming a low, plaintive tune, I used to think that I never saw any one so beautiful.

Charley came every evening; and as I watched the two sauntering arm-in-arm by the river side, or sitting by the piano singing together, or listening to each other, I used to please myself with fancying the happy married life which lay before them. And still the wedding day drew neared, and the orange flowers which were to deck Ruth's hair were budding in the conservatory.

Charley's old uncle, a wealthy bachelor, who had adopted him in his boyhood, was often with us. He seemed to take an almost fatherly pride in Ruth's gentle beauty and purity. And I knew of a rich trousseau which was in preparation for the coming day. How peacefully happy we all were. I have often wondered since that there were no omens in the sky, no whispers in the air, no black clouds anywhere, to warn us of the coming storm.

I stood on the verandah one night looking at the moon. Charley had bidden adieu to Ruth, and was going away down the path. At the gate he paused for me. Wrapping my shawl about me I went down and stood beside him. Never in my life had I seen sorrow seated beside Charley Campbell; but she was with him now. His eyes were heavy, his cheeks flushed, his head bowed upon his bosom. I looked at him in terror without the power of uttering a word. He spoke first.

"Mary," he said, "do you believe that Ruth loves me?"

"As her life," I answered, "I am sure of it."

He shook his head. "I am not," said he. "When a woman loves she blushes and trembles; she can never wear so cold and placid a face, so unperturbed a mien, she is quickly jealous—quickly moved to tears. The passionate love of a warm hearted woman passes all things. Mary, I do not believe Ruth ever loved me, or will ever love any one."

"Have you had a quarrel?" I asked breathlessly.

"A quarrel? No! I wish we had. A quarrel would show some feeling to be touched. Ruth is a beautiful, lovable creature too good for a wild fellow like me; but a man might as well worship a marble statue. She is freezing. She chills me."

"You are speaking blasphemy?" I gasped, "Ruth is an angel.

"I like a spice of the devil," muttered Charley, "Well, no matter. I'm a fool, perhaps. Good bye, Mary. Whether Ruth loves me or not, I have loved her. I suppose that should content me."

He was gone among the shrubbery and I went back to Ruth with a deadly horror at my heart. When he came again he was the same as before, and seemed to have forgotten the conversation utterly.

I had not called on the nabob's lady, nor she on me. We never suited each other. But I caught a glance of her carriage often, and three times had I seen Charley's face looking out of the window as it rolled by. And, at last, a faint breath of scandal reached my ears, and I heard the name of that bold, handsome woman mingled with Charley Campbell's in a way I did not like. Ruth heard nothing of it, however, and the wedding day was close at hand.

It came at last. The guests were there. Music and flower-perfume filled the house. In her own room, Ruth Earle, dressed in her floating robes and veil, waited for the bridegroom's coming. I heard, as I sat by the window, the quick roll of a furiously driven carriage. It paused at the gate. Some one leaped out and rushed along the path and up the stairs. The door was dashed wildly open and Charley's uncle stood amongst us. He held a written paper in his hand and his eyes started from his head with passion.

"He is gone!" he shouted—"Gone with that wicked woman. He has dared to write and tell me so. I have disinherited him, and I curse him with every curse that can light on man. May he beg his bread from door to door! May—oh, God!"

The wild voice broke, and he fell with blood starting from his lips, full length upon the floor. When we raised him he was dead. In the letter clutched by his uncle's stiffened fingers we read the words:

"When you read this I shall be far away. I fly to-night with the only woman who ever loved me. For me she has left home and honor, as I have for her. Tell Ruth—poor Ruth! whom I have used so ill—that I never deceived her. I loved her truly, but her cold love froze out my affection, pure, as I knew it was; while this erring, passionate heart with which I fly is mine entirely. She will soon be happy with another I know—happier than I shall ever be—and will forget, ere long, that there ever breathed one so unworthy of her thoughts as I.

"CHARLES CAMPBELL."

There were screams and tears and terror in the house; but there, upon the floor, sat Ruth pale and motionless, her bride's veil dabbled in the dead man's blood, and her eyes closed as though she never wished to open them.

People said she bore it bravely, when they saw her, in a little while, quietly as busy as before. When the will was opened, and it was found that Charley Campbell had been disinherited, and all the property was left to Ruth, they spoke of it as an act of justice, and thought that all was over; but I, and I only, knew of the canker worm eating at the young heart day and night.

Six months passed by, and we heard nothing of the false lover. We never spoke of him to Ruth, or among ourselves, and all the love I ever felt for him had had turned to scorn.

At last one day a letter reached me. It was post-marked C——, and was from a comparative stranger, who had written to me as Charley's only relative. Oh! what a tale was recorded in those lines. I can only give the substance. The two had fled to Europe at first; thence, when dread of pursuit was over, they had returned to this country. Then for the first they had heard of the loss of Charley's fortune and poverty seemed staring them fully in the face. Their debts accumulated and the change in circumstances brought change of affection. They quarreled madly, each reproached the other, and the white hand of the woman was often raised against the man she once professed to love. Sin-branded, beggared, poor Charley Campbell paid the penalty of his crime, and worse was yet to come.

They were in a carriage one day, driving toward a dwelling place, for debt had turned them from the old one. They were quarreling in suppresed voices, and looking hot hate into each other's eyes, when a sight arose before them that struck them dumb with horror. There, in the middle of the road, stood the woman's injured husband, with a pistol in his hand, aiming straight at them. Whether he meant to fire at her was never known; but the ball entered her heart, and she fell forward with a scream. The explosion of the pistol frightened the horse; he became unmanageable, and dashed forward down the hill, crushing the driver beneath the wheels, and stamping on and mangling him. "We think him dying now," the writer continued. "His right arm has been amputated, and he is prostrated by pain and loss of blood. He has need of the friends whom he has so much offended; will you forgive him and come to him?"

The letter fell from my trembling fingers. Ruth had stolen to my side unseen, and had read it also. Down at my feet she knelt, and buried her face in my lap as might a grieving child. Neither of us shed a tear, but we sat thus for an hour in utter silence. At last she spoke.

"I have a favor to ask Mary. Promise me that you will grant it."

"Anything, darling, I replied.

"Let me go with you," she murmured. "Let us nurse him if he is suffering, and be with him to the last if he should die. He was almost my husband once, my dear. Oh, take me with you!"

"Do you remember how he has wronged you, Ruth?" I asked.

"Mary," she answered, rising to her feet, "do not misunderstand me. I would not leave him know my presence. I do not seek to bring myself to his remembrance. I will go with you as a maid or nurse; a coarse dress, a servant's cap, and the curtained light of a sick room, will keep me from his knowledge. If he recover he shall never know that I have been near him. I only seek to see him once again, and do him what little good I can, for I loved him very dearly, Mary—very, very dearly!"

Who could withstand her? We were off next morning by the first conveyance, Ruth already wearing the servant's dress, and hidden further still beneath a close bonnet and veil.

I had thought that nothing could have softened my heart to Charley Campbell, but I was mistaken when I saw him lying before me, scarred and maimed, the shadow of his handsome self. My tears fell fast and I gave him my hand as in the old times, when I trusted in his honor and virtue. He was thankful for my presence, and whispered a faint word of welcome; but before night fell he was delirious and knew no one about him.

Oh, the long days that followed! I shall never forget them. And through all Ruth never left his pillow. When all the rest shrunk from the wild ravings and the upraised arm of delirium, she never wavered; no toil nor vigil did she spare; and when, at last, he lay quiet and weak upon his pillow, her hand brought the invigorating draught and lifted up the weary, helpless hand. And this was the heart he had deemed cold!

One day we sat together, Ruth and I, beside the window, and Charley seemed to sleep. Suddenly he stirred and called to me. I bent over him in an instant.

"Mary," he said, "I have something to say to you—something which lies very heavily at my heart. If I should die without uttering it my soul could never rest. Mary, you remember when I left Ruth. You know how I felt then. I believed her cold. I thought that in the hot passion of the woman I fled with I had found true love. I must have been mad, I think, for oh! how bitterly I have rued that belief. Mary, when you see Ruth Earle, tell her this, and, tell her, too, that long, long since I have discovered that she was my only love—that in throwing away her pure womanly affection I lost the richest jewel in my life."

The words were uttered softly, but Ruth's ear had caught them; she stood in the shadow where he could not see her and listened.

"Through all my fever I have thought of her," he went on, "and at times I have thought she stood beside me. Then I would strive to ask her forgiveness, but the sweet vision always faded, and a strange nurse was there instead, Mary, do you think Ruth hates me? She should, for I deserve it."

Oh! the mute appeal of those clasped hands and streaming eyes on the other side of the couch! I knew their meaning, and I answered as they bade me; "No, Charley, I know that Ruth has forgiven you."

"Forgiven me! yes; for she is an angel. But never, never can she love me again—never shall the link my own hand has broken be reunited. A mutilated beggar, scarred in face and heart, even were the past blotted out, she never could be mine. O Ruth! my injured, patient, loving Ruth, I would give all the world beside to hold you for one moment to my breast—to press your soft lips to mine but once again."

She had stolen from the shadow; she crept toward the bed; she outstretched both arms toward him, as a mother might seek to clasp once more her lost child; and still something held her back from the bosom where she longed to nestle.

Again he spoke, and this time he uttered only her name: "Ruth, Ruth, Ruth?" but hot tears were in his eyes, and they broke the spell which kept her from him. The coarse cap lay on the ground, the golden hair fell over her white forehead in heavy glittering masses, and with a low, tremulous cry she cast her arms about him, pillowed his thin cheek on her bosom, and gave back to Charley Campbell the quiet heart he had so well deserved to lose forever.

He has it still, and it is very dear to him, so dear that I believe no words could tell its value. Since the hour when the words were spoken which united them forever, each has trusted in the other to the uttermost, and there are no happier people in the whole length and breadth of the land than Charley and his "Quiet Ruth."

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