

# A Question of Ancestry.

BY CORA WHITTLESEY GREGORY.

It was too bad that Elmira had to come just then. Laura was having such a good time, and it would spoil everything to have a country cousin to take with her everywhere.

Laura did not admit it to herself, but the other girls knew that her "good times" meant occasions in which Jack Towsley was present.

Laura Van Ness had always had beaux, but Jack was different. She would have told you he was "awfully nice and kind," but that was all. What made Jack so "fascinating" to the girls was that none of them felt sure of him. Yet of late they all admitted that he paid Laura more attention than he did any one else.

He came from the East, and was said to be of fine family. He was tall and slender and very straight, and had what the girls called an "aristocratic" nose, and was altogether desirable.

There being a general impression that he prided himself on his ancestry, Laura had furtively consulted the books on genealogy in the city library and had found to her delight that Van Ness was an old and honorable name, and that in the old country her ancestors had been people of rank and importance.

Laura had told herself that she liked Jack Towsley because she was afraid of him, just a little, just enough to be interesting. Her father had a hardware store, and Jack was a lawyer, the son of a judge, and though he never said so, she was sure he despised trade. It was a pleasure, therefore, to tell him of her recent discoveries, and of her distinguished Dutch ancestry.

He colored a little and was rather quiet as she painted in glowing colors the glory of the Van Nesses of medieval days. "You value these things very much, Miss Van Ness?" he asked.

"No more than you do, I am sure," she replied. "I don't know. I do care for honest blood, but I think that is about all. Perhaps if I had your ancestors to be proud of it might be different."

He smiled slightly, and Laura blushed and feared she had said too much, and admired him all the more for his modesty.

Like most patriotic Americans the young people of Laura's set were given to celebrating the Fourth of July by getting as far as possible from the sound of the cannon and firecrackers and even the occasional reading of the Declaration of Independence, which belong properly to the traditional observance of the day, and as Laura said, it was really too bad that Elmira should arrive on the 2d for a month's visit. Mr. Van Ness had been guilty of extending an injudiciously elastic invitation to his sister's only daughter, and this was the result.

Laura could not even say respectfully, "Oh, papa, how could you?" which would have been a relief to her mind, for a sister's daughter is rather a near relative, and she wouldn't have hurt papa's feelings for the world.

She hadn't seen Elmira for some years, but there was a painful photograph of her, that Aunt Emily had sent framed, hanging on the wall of the family sitting room.

What troubled Laura most was the marked family likeness between her and her cousin, only in Elmira Laura's defects were exaggerated, almost caricatured, and whereas Laura was distinctly pretty, Elmira was as distinctly plain. She was five years older than Laura and five inches taller.

On the evening of the 1st of July Jack Towsley called. "My cousin Elmira is coming tomorrow," said Laura abruptly.

"That is nice," he replied innocently. "She will be here just in time for the picnic."

"Yes," said Laura, with so little animation that Jack looked at her questioningly. "I suppose she will go to the picnic?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, I suppose so. She—she is a few years older than I, and she lives in a very small town, and I don't think she dances," said Laura hesitatingly.

"Oh, well then, a picnic is just the thing," said Jack cheerfully. "It will give her a chance to meet everybody. Is she going to stay some time?"

"Yes, about a month, I believe."

"That will be pleasant for you. It must be very lonely for a girl not to have any sister."

"How kind Jack is," thought Laura; "but he hasn't seen Elmira. If only some of our nice looking, agreeable relations were coming. As I remember poor Elmira she wasn't a bit interesting, and her grammar wasn't always above suspicion, either."

The next day Elmira came, and Laura's worst fears were realized. The family had evidently exerted themselves to make Elmira "presentable."

She would have appeared better in her ordinary clothes. The profusion of cheap lace and ribbons of uncompromising hues was worse even than Laura had anticipated and her best hat, looking like a badly arranged, ill-kept flower garden, almost drew from Laura's lips an exclamation of dismay.

Elmira, mistaking her expression for one of surprised admiration, smiled complacently as she explained.

"It's gay, ain't it? But we've got a real swell milliner in Woodbine now. She goes to Centerville every spring and fall to get the fashions."

"That's very nice," said Laura feebly, "but we girls wear sailor hats so much of the time you can save this one."

"I don't want to," said Elmira. "Ma said if I ever wanted good clothes I'd want 'em now. We live kind of quiet at home."

A feeling of pity for the tall, awkward girl, nearly thirty, who had known nothing outside the limits of one small country town, and who evidently regarded this as the opportunity of a lifetime, surprised Laura into laying her hand on her cousin's arm and lifting her face for a kiss, which Elmira gave shyly.

"Dear Elmira," said she kindly, "I do hope you'll have a good time, and I'm glad you've come in time for our Fourth of July picnic."

"I'm glad, too; I always like picnics, and I ain't much of a hand for dances and the like o' that," said Elmira simply.

When the morning of the Fourth came, Laura, in a duck skirt, shirtwaist and sailor hat, explained to Elmira that that was the way all of the girls would dress, but in vain. "Of course, that's all right for you," said Elmira knowingly, "but I'm a little older, and besides, I'm a stranger. You're real kind, Laura, but I ain't going to make you ashamed of me as far as clothes go. Ma said I was to be careful not to, and that city ways were different from what they were at Woodbine. I guess we'll both feel better if I wear my new hat and my pink muslin."

"I wouldn't think of it, Elmira," pleaded Laura; "that muslin will never look the same after you've sat around on the grass in it, and then a shower may come up—we're to be gone all day, you know, and rain would utterly ruin your hat."

"You're real kind, Laura," said Elmira again,

"but you needn't worry about my clothes. I got 'em on purpose to wear, and it ain't going to rain today. The wind is blowing steady from the west, and there ain't the sign of a cloud in the sky."

So she wore the pink muslin and the new hat out of consideration for Laura's feelings and sheer delight in her unaccustomed finery. When Laura introduced "her cousin, Miss Stinson," she despised herself because she felt her face grow hot. It was Jack she was thinking of, who was so fastidious.

They drove out in a carryall drawn by four horses decked with flags.

When they were all settled and the boxes and hampers stowed away, and the girls looked around to see who was sitting next Elmira (the "giacutus," Susie French mentally christened her), they were amused to find that Jack, by a dextrous move at the last moment, had secured her for a neighbor. Smiling glances were exchanged, and one would-be-wit whispered to the girl next him, "A clear case of 'love me, love my dog.'"

Susie French leaned toward Elmira: "I suppose everyone tells you, Miss Stinson, how much you look like your cousin?"

"Well, that's what ma always told me," said Elmira, "and I saw she was right, the minute I set eyes on her—though of course I'm considerable taller and fleshier."

"You see the resemblance, I am sure," persisted Susie French, turning to Jack.

"There is certainly a family likeness," said Jack quickly, looking steadily into Susie's smiling face. She colored slightly, then turned to the young man next her, and engaged in an animated conversation, never bestowing as much as a glance in Jack's direction.

Elmira enjoyed herself immensely. She felt that the society was "high-toned," and that she was the best dressed girl present and beamed good naturedly on the entire company, thinking Susie French a particularly pleasant girl, and even appealing to her later to know if her hat were on straight. Susie knew that Laura was on the same side of the carryall with Elmira, so she could not see. She looked at the hat critically and hesitated a moment, then, "pull it just a little more to the left, Miss Stinson," she said. "There, that will do."

"I couldn't help it," she whispered to her next neighbor. "Where do you suppose she ever found such a monstrously?"

Susie French was a very pretty girl, and the young man next her had a weak chin, so he glanced at Elmira, in her pink muslin, with her large hat well over one ear, and tittered.

Elmira thought he and Susie were having a good time together, and smiled sympathetically. A moment after, at Jack's quiet suggestion, the hat was straightened.

They had to drive ten miles to reach the spot selected for the picnic, on the shore of a small lake, and by the time they got there, Elmira felt that Jack was an old friend. They had talked about Woodbine, and Elmira had told him of its diversities in the way of church "socials," meetings of "the ladies' literary club" and the mission band, and Jack had heard all about the young brother who was to go to the state university next year, and of whom they expected so much.

"Arthur always stood high in his studies, and pa's hoping to educate him for a lawyer," said Elmira, proudly. "It'll be expensive, but Arthur's the only boy in the family, and pa and ma say its only right he should have a chance."

Elmira was almost sorry when the drive was over.

Jack looked around for Laura. There was a little odd, appealing look in her eyes. "Thank you so much, Mr. Towsley, for your kindness to my cousin," she said.

"Not at all. I have enjoyed my visit with her very much. Do you know?" hesitatingly, "though you are so different, she reminds me of you, not only in looks, but in some other ways."

"Oh, does she?" asked Laura, hardly able to keep the chagrin she felt from showing in her face. What must be his opinion of her, if he thought her like poor Elmira!

"You see you are both Van Nesses, with that fine Dutch ancestry back of you," he said smiling.

What did he mean! was he laughing at her, thought Laura, coloring painfully. But no. Jack Towsley was a gentleman. He noticed the blush. "I mean," he said hastily, but just then Sallie Stemple came up to them. She was a Southern girl.

"What are you two talking about?" she asked, in a high penetrating voice. "I declare Mr. Towsley if you don't look as solemn as if Miss Van Ness'd just refused you. I expect p'raps she has. That's too bad of you two to spoil one picnic just at the beginning."

"We were only speaking of Miss Van Ness' ancestors," said Jack, "and they were such great people it wouldn't do to take their names on our lips lightly or unadvisedly."

"The idea of talking about ancestors at a picnic. Oh, Mr. Walker," calling to a good-natured little fellow, already committing himself to the shrewd chaperone to act as water carrier and concocter of various cooling drinks, "Come here and make Mr. Towsley believe."

Jimmy Walker came, nothing loth, and as Sallie Stemple chose to talk to Jack, fell to Laura's lot until they joined the rest of the party.

It was a warm day and they were all inclined to loiter near the lake, and enjoy what little air there was in motion. While some began idly to skip stones over the smooth water, Sallie Stemple and two or three of the men started a lively game of numblety pegs.

Jack Towsley had made his escape, though Sallie Stemple loudly deplored the fact and reproached him for his desertion. He sauntered toward a group at a little distance, among whom was Laura and Elmira. What a pleasure it was to get away from the noise and dirt of the city on a day like this.

He smiled as he passed Elmira, sitting upright, her pink muslin spread out with care, and looking as happy as she felt.

"May I sit here?" he said to Laura.

"Certainly," she replied, looking up with a bright smile, and drawing her duck skirt a little aside. She had been troubled by Sallie Stemple's evident desire to monopolize his attention. Of course, Jack was too refined and fastidious, she told herself, to really care for a girl like that, and yet many men found these gay Southern girls attractive, and she felt depressed and dull and commonplace. But as Jack seated himself beside her the day seemed to suddenly grow fairer, and she was conscious of a feeling of supreme content. What a beautiful world it was, and life how well worth living. She beamed

on Elmira. She was glad she had come, dear Elmira.

Just then Susie French came up from the beach with her attendant cavalier, and seated herself the other side of Jack.

"We want to be entertained," she cried. "It's too hot to do anything. Can't you tell us an interesting story, Mr. Towsley? Something about your distinguished ancestors. Didn't they flourish about the time of the Revolution? That would be so appropriate for today, you know."

"I'm afraid my ancestors were plain men," said Jack, "with nothing but their honesty to recommend them, and far too humble to have their deeds recorded in the pages of either history or romance."

"That sounds very nice and modest, but in these days of D. A. R.'s and S. A. R.'s and Colonial Dames, and goodness knows what, some of us must have come from somebody. I know one of my ancestors was carried off by the Indians and married an Indian chief—of course it couldn't have been an ancestor, but anyway it was the sister of one of my great aunts. I think it quite unpatriotic and disgraceful that we haven't a single society in town made up of anybody's descendants."

"We might organize a branch of the Daughters of the American Revolution," suggested Laura, "until somebody asks us to become Colonial Dames."

"Yes. Why not do it today?" said Susie French. "Let's all agree to join if we are eligible. I know I'm all right, for I had some kind of ancestor who was an officer in the Revolutionary war. I'll look him up. I suppose you can find a colonial governor or something among the Van Nesses, Laura, so you and Miss Stinson can take high degrees, and of course Sallie Stemple comes of a 'fine old Southern family,' all Southerners do, you know, and Susie French rattled on recklessly, suggesting possibilities in the way of ancestors till all of the party, even to little Jimmy Walker, were declared privileged to wear a badge or a button.

"I really believe in blood you know," ventured one of the young men, when Susie stopped for breath, "noblesse oblige, and all that sort of thing, 'all men are born free and equal,' but a man wouldn't exactly want to marry the daughter or even grand-daughter of a common laborer, or anything of that sort, you know."

Elmira, with a flushed face, and for several moments been trying to speak. "Miss French spoke about the Van Nesses just now," she said. "They weren't Laura's and my own ancestors. Our grandfather was only adopted. His name was Dobson. He was a real poor boy—the son of a miller." "Why Elmira, are you sure? I—I never heard of that," stammered Laura. "Oh, yes—there ain't any mistake. Ma told me all about it, and how Mr. Van Ness hadn't any son of his own, so he had grandpa take his name. Ma says I'm dreadful like gran'pa."

There was an awkward silence for a moment, broken only by shrieks of merriment from Sallie Stemple and her admirers. The game of numblety peg was ended and Sallie was condemned to root the peg. Jack did not look at Laura. Susie French did with a smile not entirely free from satisfaction.

"Well, perhaps the Dobsons, did you say the name was Dobson?" turning to Elmira, "perhaps the Dobson's fought for their independence, so we won't drop you from our list yet, will we Mr. Towsley?"

"When I look up the record of the Towsleys, I will investigate the Dobsons as well, if you will allow me Miss Van Ness. We came across a snag very early in our genealogical researches, for my grandfather was a blacksmith and as he had a character any man might be proud of, I see no reason for being ashamed of his occupation."

He spoke quietly, but there was almost a defiant ring in his voice as he turned to Susie French, prepared, if all felt, not only to fight his own battles, but Laura's.

Allie Johnson, a nice little girl and Laura's devoted friend, threw herself nobly into the breach. "I think one of my great-grandfather's kept a shop. I mean a little bit of a shop in New York once. Of course, we Americans have all kinds of ancestors. That's what makes us so nice." Laura and she exchanged affectionate glances, and Elmira, who sat next her, squeezed her hand.

Susie French drew a long breath. "This is developing into a genuine experience meeting," she exclaimed. "Does anyone else feel moved to rise and confess the shortcomings of his ancestors?"

"You and Laura seem to be in the same boat, Mr. Towsley, and," jumping up, "speaking of boats, is it too hot for a row? We've sat here till I'm tired to death. For goodness sake, let's do something."

She had made a mistake, and she knew it. Jack Towsley would not like Laura any the less because he had come forward as her champion.

Yet he seemed to avoid Laura after this. He joined Sallie Stemple, and was easily beguiled into walking with her through the woods to a point romantically called "Lover's Seat." A rough stone seat, on the summit of a knoll, gave a beautiful view of the lake below, and of the gently undulating country beyond.

You would have called it a scene to soothe the nerves, and make one forget one's cares. Yet Jack felt nervous, restless, and even irritable to the last degree. He felt that he had shown his hand, and made a fool of himself quite unnecessarily.

"From several things she has said, I believe all this time she has been thinking me of fine family, and she cares so much for that," he thought to himself, as Sallie Stemple babbled on about her interesting experience with a young man who had such "romantic" eyes.

"A fellow has a certain advantage when a girl thinks he is indifferent," thought Jack, "but to betray how much I cared for Laura, and the fact that I was the grandson of a blacksmith at the same time, was the act of a consummate ass. Yet I couldn't sit still and see her suffer, poor little thing, how helpless and distressed she looked. Strange that I ever thought Susie French a nice girl. She's mean and spiteful beyond a man's comprehension."

"I beg your pardon, what were you saying?" as Sallie came to a pause evidently expecting him to reply.

"Never mind what I was saying. I don't believe you've been listening to a word I've said. I expect I was right this mornin' about Miss Van Ness's refusal of you. You look just like a young man I know did on such an occasion."

"Do it. Well I will confess that I have every reason to think the young lady in question would refuse me if I gave her the opportunity, but it isn't quite as bad as you expected yet."

"I'm right glad. If I was a man I wouldn't ask a girl till I was right sure how she felt. It must be so embarrassing."

"Yes, so I should fancy," said Jack, smiling.

"Now I don't believe you know anything about it, or you wouldn't laugh. I don't expect you've ever proposed to a girl in your life. Now have you, Mr. Towsley?"

"Well, no, not exactly," said Jack.

"That's just what I thought, for you're the kind of man it wouldn't be—well, really now, it wouldn't be right easy to refuse you, I expect. I just imagine you could be right fascinatin' if you tried, Ja—I mean Mr. Towsley."

"What a contrast to Laura," thought Jack. "Oh, I'm afraid not," said he coldly, "at least I don't often try. Shan't we go back, Miss Stemple? It must be nearly time for luncheon."

"Just what I was thinking," said Sallie, quite unabashed, picking up her skirts to show two dainty high-heeled little shoes.

Jack did walk down the stony path rather fast, considering those shoes, but then he had forgotten all about them. Already his thoughts had flown back to Laura when, with a slight exclamation of pain, Sallie stumbled over a broad stone, and just as in response to his offer of assistance she leaned against him, half fainting, he heard voices and at a turn in the path appeared Jimmy Walker and Laura.

"Confound the girl," he muttered, "what will Laura think?" Aloud he said, as indifferently as he could, "I am so glad you have come, Miss Stemple has just met with an accident."

They both hurried forward. Sallie was placed in a comfortable position supported by Laura, who offered her services so eagerly that Jack smiled to himself and felt several degrees more cheerful.

Jimmy Walker brought water in his hat and applied it with a monogrammed handkerchief, and in a moment the patient revived and graciously permitted the two men to support her, one on either side, back to the picnic ground, where they found the tablecloth already spread and horns sounding to recall the wanderers.

It did not prove to be a bad sprain, and Sallie was able to get about the rest of the day with only an interesting limp and leaning on Jimmy Walker's ever-ready little arm.

It was late in the afternoon, almost time for the return home, before Jack summoned sufficient courage to ask Laura if she would like to take a row. She had been very subdued and rather pale since Elmira's disclosure, and Jack understood better perhaps than any of the others what a shock it had been to her.

He helped her into the boat silently. They were well out from shore before either of them spoke. He had been wondering how to begin, but all he said was, "You look tired."

"Do I? I am, rather. It has seemed such a long day."

"And I suppose you will be glad when it is over?" "I don't know. I am fond of the water. This rests me."

"It rests me, too. What a tiresome girl that Sallie Stemple is."

"Is she? I don't know her very well," in a constrained voice.

"You know her as well as I do, and as well as I care to," said Jack, emphatically.

He looked at Laura keenly, and fancied her expression brightened.

"Your cousin seems to have enjoyed herself," he continued.

"Yes, I think she has." Laura's face clouded again. Jack understood why.

"That was so nice and brave and honest, the way she spoke about your great-grandfather. There is a simplicity and frankness about her that I admire very much. That is what reminds me of you in her, as I was going to tell you when Sallie Stemple interrupted us."

"Oh, were you? Thank you. I think Elmira is very frank," and Laura's color, which had been changing from white to red, settled to a becoming pink.

"I was afraid, that is, I thought perhaps," trailing one little hand in the water and watching it intently as she spoke, "you wouldn't have any respect for me after what she said. It made me seem so foolish."

"How could you think that? It wasn't your fault in the least. But I am so glad you cared for what I thought. I was afraid you didn't, and that you would resent my speaking as I did and seeming to take your part when I had no right to."

"Oh, no. I thought it was very noble of you," said Laura earnestly, raising her eyes to his for a moment.

"But you must have seen, and every one else must have seen, that it was because I loved you that I spoke as I did."

No reply. "Didn't you know it, Laura?" A whispered "No," and a shake of the drooping head, with only the pretty profile turned toward him.

"But now you know. It was because I love you with all my heart, my darling, only I never dared tell you for fear you would despise the grandson of a blacksmith because you were a Van Ness. I could bless your cousin today if her relation has brought us any nearer. Has it Laura?"

She raised her head slowly. "I don't think it really has Jack (and he knew the victory was won), but perhaps we shouldn't have known how near we were but for Elmira."

And as they rowed ashore an hour later there was Elmira waiting for them, her pink muslin a mass of wrinkles, her hat awry, but her honest face smiling and flushed with content.

"We thought you two were never coming," she cried. "They say we've got to start now to get home in time for the fireworks."

"All right," said Jack heartily, and in their hearts they both responded, "Bless you, dear Elmira, and your pink muslin and your best hat."

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"They won't see their watches again," said young detective, looking down the list. "not this of Jordan's shore. Wooden case marked H. M. diamond 415, with a label Basle to London."

The wind was careering up Leman street though it had just arrived at the riverside after long absence, and was anxious to see all over East end of London without delay; being in 2 spirits it caught a tall opulent young woman with brown cloak and small umbrella were in full; and blew the umbrella sportively inside out, so that the young woman had to tack, and presently to harbor in a doorway.

"More weather," remarked Mr. Furley. "It's never you, is it?" said the young lady angrily.

"Well, it ought to be. I was just coming to your place, Miss Reinach."

At Reinach's tailor shop, on the ground floor Cannon street road, was, in the room crowded with furniture at the back, a lazy fire burning.

"Uncle's been and let the fire get low enough complained Miss Reinach. "When he's got anything on his mind he don't think of nothing else. Excuse me half a moment while I get some wood."

When the young lady reappeared at the doorway with two short planks Mr. Furley took one strip placed it within the bars of the grate; the other which bore some marks, he placed as reserve stock in the fender.

"You don't mind my setting to work, do you