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A Select Story.

FROM THE OLIVE BRANCH.
HOMELY MARY,
 —OR—
THE USELESS DAUGHTER.

BY KATE CARROLL.

ELLEN is a magnificent girl, Mrs. Stenlowe. There is not another in Belton that can compare with her," said Mrs. Carleton, looking with deep admiration upon the retiring form of a young lady in the garden attached to the home where the two matrons were knitting.

"She is," said Mrs. Stenlowe, in a tone filled with maternal satisfaction, her eyes also following the fair girl, who is, I hardly know what I should do without her," and tears came with the words "without her."

"So accomplished, elegant in form, fascinating in manner, amiable and beautiful, what may you not expect for her in a matrimonial connection?"

"Sure enough. But I cannot think of that yet. I should miss her so. I wish it were not so odious a thing to be an old maid!"

"Were it not you'd prevail on her to be one?"

"Yes, for the sake of keeping her with me."

"Fie, fie! Mrs. Stenlowe! You are selfish. Ellen should be married, she would be such an ornament to a man and establishment worthy of her."

"She would, indeed," said the mother, whose face brightened as Ellen turned and walked towards the house, which she soon entered, and with the former repaired the afternoon visit of their guest very pleasantly.

"Supper is ready, ladies," said a low, timid voice, just as the tall, old corner time-piece struck five.

"That's Mary, I believe. How d'ye do, Mary!" came very indifferently from the lips of the lady who had been nearly the whole afternoon chastising the praises of Ellen.

"Quite well, ma'am, how is your health?" and Mary paused a moment, respectfully waiting an answer.

"Nicely. He-gho!" (turning to Ellen,) how sleepy on is after a late night. You attended the concert?"

"I did. Was it not divine? I was in regions of Paradisical glory."

"How eloquent you are! George saw you there," with a smile.

"Yes, we exchanged nods. Who was the gentleman with him? A splendid-looking man, by the way!"

"He is, and with a character as perfect. He is Charles Kingman."

"Oh New York!—the eloquent young clergyman, that religious, and indeed, all papers are raving over!"

"The same. He is not married," with a meaning smile.

Ellen would not ask what he pledged, but wished to.

"Nor engaged," added Mrs. Carleton, with another smile, as she seated herself at the almost literally "groaning table."

"Mary, if there is room you can sit. Opposite Mrs. Carleton you can place a chair."

"Yes, ma'am, and a smile of unaffected pleasure broke over the girl's face.

A face by no means beautiful, nor even pretty, but full of a homely interest peculiarly its own. Nor was her form a bit prettier, and whatever there might have been about it to relieve it of the charge of downright ugliness, was entirely concealed by a long, narrow, high-necked check tye that made her look like a perambulating meal sack, or any similar inelegant thing.

"Don't settle down in such a bunch," said Ellen, in a peremptory manner, as Mary, apparently forgetful of everything about her, with bending figure and hands clasped on her lap, had fallen into a reverie.

The words of Mrs. Carleton had moved the still waters of Mary's soul, until like a turbulent stream they threatened to overthrow her peace of mind, and fill it with strange, unhappy disquiet.

"I had forgotten my poor habit of making myself a fright," said Mary, with an attempt at a smile.

"It's so disagreeable to be forever prompting and prompting," added Ellen, knitting her beautifully arched brows, and snapping out each word.

"It is, Ellen. I'm sorry I asked Mary to sup at our table. Does she disturb you, Mrs. Carleton?"

"Not in the least, Mrs. Stenlowe," said the lady appealed to, repeating immediately after the words that had occasioned Mary her reprimand.

"Why will she say that again," thought Mary, cowering in spirit, and longing to hide her face from mortal gaze.

"Beauty is loved for itself. It is a glorious gift. Heaven never sent to earth greater. Love seeks it as naturally as flowers the sunlight. Ah, Ellen! what may you do not do with your peerless face and matchless form," said Mrs. Carleton, for the third time.

With a toss of her jetty curls, Ellen simperingly thanked the wholesale dealer in flattery, while Mary, with more unkindness in her heart than was ever there before, moodily thought—Mrs. Carleton is a woman of reputation, and consequently much of a bore.

Her conscience instantly reproached her for forming such ill-tempered judgment, while she became aware that her face wore crimson for her sin. Poor Mary essayed to hide her painful blushes by taking deep draughts of tea that half choked her.

"What a guzzling!" was the next elegant observation from Ellen's coral lips.—Even Mrs. Carleton's love for beauty could not blind her to a belief that this was a perfect sentence. But not only Ellen, but the two matrons looked reprovingly at Mary, who murmured—

"Please excuse me from the table."

"At once!" sternly replied Mrs. Stenlowe.

"What a relief!" said Ellen, with a long breath.

"How different," observed Mrs. Carleton. "I never shall be anything," sighed Mary as once more in the long, dark kitchen, she leaned her head on the dresser and cried, "I shall never be anything! Other people can be something without trying a bit! Oh, dear! I wonder why I was born!"

"Mary, bring more hot water," called Mrs. Stenlowe.

"How can I show myself with such red eyes, and disordered hair!" Yet Mary quickly calmed herself, and obeyed the order, and then quickly retreated to the kitchen.

"Did you notice her eyes, mother?"

"Yes, Ellen," said Mrs. Stenlowe, shaking her head.

"How different," repeated Mrs. Carleton, with the deepest commiseration depicted in her look and tone.

"So apt to mope round with watery eyes," sighed Mrs. Stenlowe, passing preserver a third time to her guest, who was famous for slipping pleasantly through life by ministering to the vanities and weaknesses of her acquaintances—in fact, riding prosperously into port, while wrecks laid behind and around her.

"George will call for me," she observed, at length, sitting back in her chair.

"Why did he not come to tea," asked Mrs. Carleton.

"Because he and Mr. Kingman were engaged. I forgot to ask where."

"I wish both had come," thought Ellen. "He would have been charmed with these cream cakes. He's very fond of them. Did you make them?"

"Oh, no, Mary did," said Mrs. Carleton.

"This plum cake is the nicest I ever tasted. You must have made it!"

"Wrong again; Mary did. I have more important things to attend to. Such that do not lie in her capacity."

"And did she make these preserves?"

"Yes, ma'am, and everything on the table, even to the cover itself."

"She's something of a wonder. I thought the cover an important one. See's something of a wonder. Very good help, or pretty good, aren't she?"

Ellen laughed, and said her tastes were not in the neighborhood of iron pots, brick ovens and spinning wheels. For her part she was glad to know that she had a soul above such occupations. As she spoke her eyes sparkled, and her cheek took a richer hue, for she thought she was speaking wittily and sensibly. Her mother looked proudly upon her, and thanked Providence for the gift of so beautiful and wise a daughter.

"What, little daisy, crying hear alone! My sakes, where is your mother, that she isn't wiping your eyes, and asking what made the tears come!" said a rough, good-looking farmer, entering the back porch and looking into the kitchen, leaning on a dresser of which was Mary silently weeping.

"Hush! father, mother has company," whispered Mary, going to the pump just outside the door, and filling a basin with cool water, washed her eyes and then returned to the kitchen which her father was moodily pacing.

"Company? Who is it?" he paused to ask.

"Mrs. Carleton—"

"I s'pose so—ipocac and flattery! Ellen is of course in her element."

"She is so beautiful," interposed Mary, extenuatingly.

"Mumph! Like a tulip—great show,

but no sweetness. Whew! that boarding school and your mother's flattery have ruined the girl!"

"O, no, no! she's so beautiful!"

"Now, you silly, little chit, the notion that there's nothing under the sun like human beauty, has been drilled into you until you have very probably wished you could hide your face in the earth like a mole! Say, haven't you?" and the farmer held her close to his gaze, a rough hand on each shrinking, blue-checked shoulder.

Mary could not deny that some such wish had crossed her mind.

"I knew it."

"But I am so ugly, it must be painful to look at me. Still, I can't help my face; would it I could. I've tried to improve it, indeed! I have!"

"I s'pose so, by working over the fire till you've blistered it—by dapping in hot water till you've parboiled it—by permitting your hair to be cropped till your neck is brown as a mulatto—by working out in the sun to please certain selfish beings I could name, till you've planted a fine lot of freckles, till you are no longer my daisy, but an ugly tiger lily."

"O, father! how can you!"

"Don't you know pet, (Mary laughed gently as he said it) my pet. What is there funny in your being that? Well, to proceed (he was about to seat himself and draw her to a perch on his knee,) you ought to know—"

"What! that you ought to go in to supper?" faintly interposed Mary, slipping away.

"When they are done, yes. Then, little Molly, we'll go together. Until then—here, you monkey! sit on my knee—I want to drive the conviction into that brain of yours that you have certain rights of your own that you ought to respect, and make others respect."

Mary opened wide her eyes, and asked if he were smiling at her.

"It's a fact. You have, I should have told you this before, had I suspected you were unhappy under the yoke. Thank you for giving me a glimpse of your sly tears."

"I didn't want you to find it out," Mary hid her face on his breast.

"I s'pose so, fearing I, too, would be unhappy. I am."

"You shouldn't be, I shaan be—"

"Hoity toity! why?"

"Because I am ugly, and am't smart and gifted like Ellen, and I am only fit to do common things—"

"Eol-rol, de ri do!"

"O, but I am't. You must see it!—nothing but your useless daughter!"

At this announcement Mary broke down and sobbed without restraint.

"Now, by the powers!—if my wife shouldn't be hung for fanaticism, no woman ever ought to have been!" said the farmer clasping the girl more closely in his arms and kissing proudly her forehead.

"Mary, little darling, look up! You're the only one of the family worth the second thought of a true soul! You're a living illustration of patience, virtue, piety, forbearance and genius, yes, I repeat it, (perceiving your about to pronounce denial,) and genius. Who has taken the pains to teach you anything but drudgery? and yet how much you know! You suppose I'm blind, I dare say, and cannot see the way you tie a coquet, arrange the fall of curtain, set a table, furnish a closet, put a bonnet on—if it is a mean affair, I have the grace of the artist; and—now listen, pet—and make verses. There, now it's all out!"

"How did you know it? But they aren't verses?" and Mary again hid her head, but this time to hide her blushes.

"They are genuine verses, such as Milton himself might have been proud of."

"O, father, now you are a flatterer! Milton's genius was too grand to bring forth such weak things as my fancy would."

"Hum! Well, I won't pretend to quarrel with you! To me they are better than anything he ever wrote, especially his Satan, who is too beautiful, I think, to be held up as a bugbear to a young or old sinner. So you see that beauty-marked price of iniquity make Milton not quite as perfect as he might have been as a poet."

"Do you love poetry, father?" exclaimed Mary, again raising her head and looking earnestly into his face.

"I do, when it's the right sort. Why? Now out with it, if you've a question on hand."

"Mayn't we read it together these coming long winter evenings?"

"To be sure."

"In this kitchen?"

"Whew, why not in the sitting-room, or parlor, wherever the family happen to be?"

"Because, because," Mary began.

"Al, I see. You think they'd laugh at us, and deem you a trifle out of your sphere."

"Don't think so harshly of mother, she can't help her dislike to ugly things, neither can Ellen," coaxed Mary, whose gentle heart was filled with regret over her tell-tale tears, and sorrow that such resentment filled her father's breast.

"I shall judge them right, and be led by the nose no longer. That's enough on that subject. When shall we begin our evenings with the poets?"

"As soon as you can. You'll know best father."

"Well, in this kitchen, you say. But stop, how would you like to have the bedroom overhead cleared up, papered, painted, carpeted, decently furnished with maps, bookcase, a lounge or two, stove and writing table?"

"O, that would be too delightful! But, Mary's countenance fell."

"But you think furious objections will be raised. Don't worry nor cry. Trust to me. The room shall be improved, devoted to our purpose, and given to you for your little sanctum where you can read, study, and make verses as you like. You the useless daughter! Hmph! too useless that I couldn't live an hour away from you."

"Do you really love me so?" asked Mary, in tones of mingled joy, hope, surprise and doubt.

It had been a glad quarter hour to her. As never before her father's eyes and soul had been open to her needs! How truly glad and thankful was he for those tears. How rejoiced that he entered in time to see such intentional signs of misery. And how he did wish that mothers would not set up household idols, and encourage tea-drinking gossips with tongues reckless flattery and dissension.

"Why don't you set the table anew for Mr. Stenlowe?" said the farmer, appearing suddenly upon the scene in the kitchen, and eyeing sharply the actors.

"Well, little pet, I'll let you down long enough for that. Mind you set two cups, plates, knives, &c.; you're to be my little tea pourer!" said Mr. Stenlowe, with point and firmness, as Mary, a little afraid slipped off.

"Of course she is to pour out your tea, as you didn't come in time to have supper with Ellen, the company and me."

"I'm glad on't! I'm saved one infliction. I don't encourage gossip!"

"My—why, what has taken possession of you! What would Mrs. Carleton say to such a libel!"

"Nothing like the truth, I'll wager! Oh! she is as false—as false—"

"Never mind finishing the sentence; your comparison would be a mile from the fact I dare say! I think her an incomparable woman, quite without an equal in Belton."

"Then the men are to be most consumedly pitted?"

"We'll discuss that some other time, I haven't time now. After supper please make yourself presentable, for Mr. George Carleton and his friend, Mr. Kingman, of New York, are to call here to accompany our visitors home."

"I'll dress up—don't fret. I'd like to see that smart young divine that is electrifying people just now. He's having his day. Wife do you know every dog has his day, and Mr. Stenlowe rose at the summons of Mary to partake of his supper, but walked slowly to look sternly into the face of his astonished wife, and obtain her answer.

"What ails the man?"

"Oh, nothing! I've only found out the necessity of helping that animal to obtain his day!"

And Mr. Stenlowe passed into the next room where Mary smilingly, yet half frightened, awaited him.

"Sit down, pet. Eat heartily, or your old father will lose his appetite, hungry as he is!"

"Never fear; I feel like making everything on the table disappear at a single mouthful."

"That's right daisy. But (speaking lower) didn't they allow you to sit with them?"

"Oh, yes indeed."

"No evasion pet! But what a fool I am in marrying the present pleasure. We'll remember our little sanctum over the kitchen."

"Mary, though very near crying, brightened up, and smiled again. But the meal was none of the happiest; after all."

While Mr. Stenlowe was drinking tea, Ellen proposed to walk in the garden. While there, she managed to soil her pretty buff-colored lawn solely that she might have an excuse for appearing before the

expected gentlemen in an elegant white flounced, dotted muslin, that she considered particularly becoming to her.

Kingman little expected to see so perfect and well bred a beauty in his call at the old fashioned farm-house. Carleton was not so deeply smitten, for he had long ago glanced inside the beautiful casket, and seen how imperfect were the gems it contained.

"I wish I could hear Mr. Kingman talk," thought Mary, clearing away the dishes. At that moment, her father, spruce, dressed, came into the kitchen from his bedroom beyond.

"Hurry up, little pet. Come, hand me a towel. I'll wipe the dishes; I want you to prink up, too, and go in to have a chat with the grand young minister."

"Why? they—that is, I can't go in. I mean I'm too bashful," said Mary, greatly overpowered.

"You are going in, child. I'll help you," I said.

"The towel will lint you. I can finish and dress in a half an hour."

"Well then, if you won't let me help you, I'll call for you at the expiration of that time."

"Oh, if I were but better looking! I wonder how I do look! He's so sensible, I should like to have him think me not quite a fright. One good thing, it is evening; I shall look the better for that as even Ellen says she is far handsomer by lamplight. I can sit in the shade, too, and why need I care about my face, when really all I want is to hear him talk. I hope father and he will draw each other out—Not many men can know more than father; yet he is a self-taught man!"

Still, after setting herself on the wish to hear Mr. Kingman talk only, and not care about the want of beauty, poor Mary would often, with a quiet sigh, lament her homeliness, or ugliness, as her mother and Ellen termed it.

face to promise beauty—pshaw! of course there can't be—but decent looks when I And Mary washed her face and hands, newly smoothed her short hair, and put on a drab print, very neat and plain, with high neck, and long sleeves buttoned at the wrist. She had no collar for her neck, but did not regret it much. And then in want of a glass in her own room she stole down into Ellen's, and took a stealthy survey of herself in the handsome mirror there.

Was she beautiful? she longed so much to be that her mental lips framed the question, although she knew the utter impossibility of her receiving an affirmative. She paused, even turned her face from the mirror, for the tones of a full, rich, musical voice rose to her ear.

"What a voice. Ah how wretchedly in significant he must deem me. Oh, Ellen, Ellen if you could spare me but a tithe of your matchless beauty!"

The more she listened, the more intense became her longing for the gift Nature had denied her.

Her whole mind and soul were full of the question. Somehow the mirror did not give her the satisfaction that a clear, sunny pool of water had many a time, when, as now, she had seen a child's brown, and freckled face, that none would think of calling beautiful. True there were brows dark, arched even, and pencilled with rare perfection, eyes large, grey and melting, a nose not exactly modelled for a sculptor, but still very passable in its way. Her cheeks, though brown as a berry, were round and pretty if the glance of unattractive love could have seen it, and her mouth if wide and full of decayed, straggling teeth, had red, curved lips, and a round dimpled chin beneath. Her throat, too, was round and graceful to outline. But Mary turned away, sure that she was nothing less than an unmitigated fright. She had a mind to run into her attic and go to bed.

"Where are you my daisy?" called her father from the bottom of the stairs, "Come I am waiting."

Mary paused to give a final touch to her simple preparations. As she did so, her mother came into the entry, and said in a quick, low voice—

"Mary is not to enter the parlor, Mr. Stenlowe. She almost mortified Ellen to sit at the table by her *gaucheries*. I fairly had to send her out."

"Come pet!" called Mr. Stenlowe, not minding his wife.

"I guess not, father. Indeed, I am not fit to appear before such people," replied Mary, brokenly.

"It's your doings, wife. All of it is, if Mary cannot enter the parlor, I shall not; and you may excuse my impoliteness in any way you please to Mr. Kingman. Such a proceeding on my part, might materially interfere with plans that I can plain

ly see Ellen and you have conjured up already. But I don't approve of exalting one child and crushing another—nor of one sister riding rough shod over the feelings of another, and the better, by Jove."

"Well, if you will mortify me, and render Ellen miserable, and yourself a laughing stock, Mr. Stenlowe, bring Mary in."

"I thought I could settle accounts with her," said Mr. Stenlowe, laughing to himself, as his wife's thin figure re-entered the parlor.

"Come, Mary, never mind what she said. She inwardly scorns the rough old farmer, too. Never care; we'll shine yet, Molly. In our little sanctum, hey? I expect light enough for the whole world will stream abroad from it. Oh, little Molly, it's a great thing to be a genius!"

"How can I wound him by refusal! Were it to, it would be but selfish cognition of my own ruptured feelings. I will go. Father shall not be banished from such congenial society."

But it required a great deal of courage in spite of her resolution to calm her wounded spirit, and join her father at the foot of the stairs; yet she was able at length to do so.

"My youngest daughter," said Mr. Stenlowe, fondly presenting Mary, who felt like shrinking into nothingness as she met the kind glance of Kingman's eyes—eyes, too, that instantly sought the radiant face of Ellen.

"He thinks me a scarecrow, I knew he would. By way of indemnification, he had to turn to Ellen's beautiful countenance," sighed Mary mentally.

"Sit here little pet," said Mr. Stenlowe, placing her beside him on a divan in the corner.

Ellen was glad her sister was so far from view of Mr. Kingman. When Mary entered, Ellen had inwardly groaned, thinking it was all up with her plan for who'd want such a queer looking relative.

Mary listened with thrills of joy to a conversation between her father and Mr. Kingman. It was on *arctura* (girl of fourteen), thought the latter, noting her deep interest. But every sentence on either side was full of instruction and vital importance to one whose mind was hungry for intellectual food.

As she listened, a sense of life in its holiest meaning, swelled high and exultant in her heart. Some hidden vein in which encased told her of greater gifts than mere external beauty of form and face. A power to do—to act—aye, and to suffer if need be, grandly, heroically, made known its existence in her soul. How glowingly the golden moments danced along. What rapid flights an untrammelled fancy was taking into the rosiest future that mortal ever sketched. How laustrous grew those deep, grey eyes under their raven arches and curling lashes. And what eloquent thoughts kept rising and playing around her red lips, that from very bashfulness would not permit them to escape. At last, however, one sentence, short, pectical, beautiful, would find voice. But Mary grew instantly frightened.

"Don't tremble so, darling. Speak when you please," encouraged Mr. Stenlowe pressing her fondly to his side.

"That sentence."

What were the rapid nothings exquisite plaything, and beautiful face of Ellen to be compared with it? Nothing. The proud beauty has had her day. She had been weighed in the scales and found wanting.

Mr. Kingman looked long and earnestly at the shy little speaker. Could he believe his own ears. It seemed impossible, she was so *outré* a thing.

"I will draw her out again," he resolved, and he did.

"Truly he is a magnet," sighed Mary, frightened at her inability to keep quiet. Ah, how proudly her father's heart swelled, as he clasped her hard, brown little hand.

"Isn't it time for Mary to go to bed?" whispered Ellen, uneasily watching Mr. Kingman as he crossed the room, and actually crowded upon that divine in the corner beside the farmer.

"It is," said Mrs. Carleton, who then added—

"Mary, your bed hour has arrived."

"Yes, ma'am," said the child, half crying.

"I hope Miss Mary, I shall frequently see you during my visit in this town."

He waited for her assent. She did not dare to speak for she felt the chained anger of her mother and sister.

"She will be glad to meet you often, sir. My little d