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Saved by a Piece of Lace.

MRS. RUTHERFORD was looking over her laces. There were many choice pieces of points purchased in Europe; Mechlin and Brussels points, Limerick points, with other Irish laces, Honiton, delicate d'Alencon, and one precious piece of antique points de Venise, for Mrs. Rutherford was a connoisseur in laces, and threw away her money in a recklessly extravagant way whenever a fine piece was concerned.

"Hope Rutherford, I wish you would tell me how you happened to take the lace mania," I said, as I lifted from the handsome Japanese casket an odd piece, a mixture of lace and embroidery, which I fancied she had picked up in some out-of-the-way corner of Switzerland.

"I believe I was ten years old," she replied, "when I began my study of laces. The strip which you hold in your hand was my first acquisition. It has a rather curious history. Would you like to hear it?"

And then Hope Rutherford told me the following story, which proved to be not of quaintly costumed peasants in some Swiss Valais, or of some princely lady of the court of Francis I., but of her own stormy childhood and first love.

The daughter of a pioneer judge, Hope's early life had been spent in the West, five miles from the little town of Conflict. Their nearest neighbors were the Antoinnes. A shrinking little woman with light hair and washed-out eyes was Mrs. Antoine, but she had a furtive way of glancing from them that seemed to tell that she might have had ideas of her own before they were crushed out by the Colonel, who had never been in the army, and held his title only as a mark of respect. Of French descent, and of a fiery Gallic temperament, he united to many hereditary vices others for whose distinctive originality he might have taken out a patent. Life with him could not have been pleasant to him under any circumstances.

The two dwellings stood within a few rods of each other, but a long detour was necessary to pass between them, for, dividing the wooded knoll, on which Colonel Antoine had reared his strange structure, from the broad acres of corn field, scarcely overtopped by Squire May's stockade of logs and mud, ran a deep ravine, the bed of a fierce little stream called the Wild Cat.

Another gulf separated them, for though their position as settlers in new Kansas offered many points of resemblance in the trials and hardships which both met so bravely, yet the heads of the families when they met, as they did on their way to and from Conflict, never recognized each other. Mrs. Antoine would have explained this in her mellow accents, "Taint to be helped, I s'pose, sence you uns are from the Nawth and we uns from the Saouth."

The very houses with their surroundings spoke the difference between them. Squire May's farm had been as thickly wooded as the Colonel's estate, but with his own right arm he had chopped down the trees, built his home of two rooms and a loft above them, pried up the stumps, ploughed and sown his corn field. After three years of labor as a farmer he was beginning to reap results. The deserted law books stood upon the rough shelves against the log wall of the "front room;" a good library of miscellaneous literature kept them company. Above the books hung the Squire's carbine, only used against the prairie chickens, for he was a man of peace. A rag carpet of Mrs. May's workmanship covered the floor. Everything bore marks of thrift and industry. Colonel Antoine had preempted his

claim the year previous to the coming of the Mays. The Wild Cat joined the Missouri river near the site which he had chosen for his residence, and the reason of his choice of this particular spot had been the presence at its mouth of a sunken steambot, its upper cabin just emerging from the muddy water. A band of the Colonel's companions, sympathizing in the noble cause which had led him to leave his plantation in Missouri, that of helping to drive all "free State" men from Kansas, had come over to help establish him in his new home. They brought a gang of negroes with them, and had a "raising," in which a great deal of whiskey was consumed, and the cabin of the sunken steamer was raised and dragged to the top of the knoll. Its side faced the road, presenting the peculiar spectacle of a house with twenty front doors. After this it needed not a great deal of work on the Colonel's part to render it habitable, and it was not long before he removed to it his family and chattels. The former consisted of his gentle wife and four boys, and the latter of one mule, one cow, and one "niggah," faithful Aunt Pollyanthus. The Colonel made no attempt to improve the place, but proceeded daily to Conflict, mounted on his mule, and armed in the most ferocious manner, his business being politics and gambling.

And yet, in spite of this chasm between them, human nature asserted its claim, and the "women folks" of these two homes became earnest friends.— Though Mrs. May disapproved of the shiftlessness of Mrs. Antoine's house-keeping, of the dirty ruffled pillow-cases, of the painted plaster paris parrot on the clock-shelf, of the number of the Colonel's empty whiskey bottles and old boots that strewed the ground opposite the front entrance, and of the calmness with which Mrs. Antoine regarded the confusion of her kitchen and the ragged condition of her sons' clothing, while she worked endless bands of very dirty but very fine embroidery, yet she loved the little woman with all her heart, and had done so ever since the night she had locked the drunken Colonel in one of the staterooms, and battled death with her until at dawn a fifth little Antoine lay in his mother's arms.

"Don't talk to me," she would say to her husband. "One has only to look at those boys to know there is pluck in their mother." And if Gus Antoine, the eldest, was a sample of what the rest would be, her words had their weight. Gus was fifteen, a clerk in a bookstore at Conflict, and it was principally from his earnings that the family were supported. They saw him walking bravely to town early every morning, carrying his dinner in a little tin pail, his jacket, whose buttons were all old bachelors, in that no one of them had a mate, fastened tightly to the throat, where it was met by a turned paper collar and flashy magenta necktie. Squire May liked the boy. Once, when he had called on some errand, he stood for a long time puzzled and curious before a box of geological specimens which the Squire had collected. "What are them things?" he asked.

"Fossil leaves," replied Squire May. "I give myself a vacation every summer, and go off for a week or two geologizing."

The boy asked a few more questions before he left, which showed him bright and observing. A fortnight he came again.

"I've been reading all about them things," he said. The sale of books was not brisk at Conflict, and during the intervals of trade Gus had plenty of time to read. Still, the Squire was surprised to find that the boy had gone through a volume of Hitchcock and one of Hugh Miller, making himself as intelligent a master of their contents as it was possible to be without the aid of specimens. "I recited what I read daytimes every night to mother," he continued, "and if father would only lend me Sarsaparilla, that's the mule, I'd like to go jollygizing with yer."

"I'll take you with me in the buggy," said the Squire, "if you can obtain leave of absence from the store."

Through their three years of neighborhood the friendship between the two grew and strengthened, till at the time at which your story finds them the Squire remarked to his wife that he did not believe he could think more of Gus

Antoine if he were his own son, and he intended to commence reading law with him soon. There was one other who looked forward to the boy's visits with pleasure, the Squire's only child, little Hope. She had gone strawberrying and hazel-nutting with him before he had won her father's favor. All the Antoine boys had strongly marked French features, with startled black eyes and hair to match, forming a strong contrast to Hope's blonde beauty. Mrs. May had been horrified on their first arrival to find her little daughter seated beside a stump, on which her toy dishes were displayed, entertaining a troop of ragged boys. The entertainment consisted of a doughnut broken in minute bits, and, most astounding sight for a New England mother, the youthful Antoinnes had brought as their contribution to the feast a cup half filled with New Orleans molasses, some scraps of dried orange peel, and a bottle, in which there still remained a few spoonfuls of whiskey, with which ingredients and a little water Gus was compounding a drink and filling the tiny pewter cups with all the expertness of a California bartender.

While Gus was away "jollygizing" with her father, Hope went every day to recite French lessons to Mrs. Antoine, and to learn to make the marvelous embroidery, whose great eyelets were filled in with cobweb-like wheels in lace stitches of polite d'Alencon. So the summer passed, but with the fall came the elections. Squire May returned from his brief vacation to learn with surprise that the "free State" party had nominated him as their candidate for the district judge-ship, and that his opponent on the Democratic ticket was Colonel Antoine. The election was closely contested but ended in the usual way, Colonel Antoine's friends coming over from Missouri, voting for him and rendering the Democrats triumphant. Squire May was heard to protest loudly against the illegality of this proceeding, and as he drove toward home it was observed that his usual calm temper was much disturbed.

The day following the election was an eventful one to Mrs. Antoine and Hope as they sat over their embroidery on a bench under the broad-leaved catalpas in front of the Antoine mansion. A grotesque shadow was thrown upon the path, and Hope grasped Mrs. Antoine's arm in alarm, wondering what strange animal would follow. It was only a pedlar, and both she and Mrs. Antoine were soon deep in the contents of the pack, which consisted of several cases of cheap jewelry, a few pieces of flimsy dress goods, and some coarse Hamburg embroideries. Mrs. Antoine looked over these interestedly, but with a smile on her lips. "I can embroider better than that myself, and so can this little girl."

"Let me see what you do," said the pedlar, and Hope displayed a long strip of the mingled embroidery and lace work, the pattern in each eyelet being one of Gus Antoine's design—an anchor—it meant hope, he said.

"I give you fifty cents for dat," said the stranger.

"Oh! will you?" exclaimed Hope delighted, while Mrs. Antoine rose, hastened into the house, and returned with the entire collection, which she had worked since she left the convent. The pedlar was an evil-looking man, and Hope was afraid to be left alone with him, but Colonel Antoine sauntered in at the gate as his wife entered the house. For a wonder, he was sober, and Hope felt her courage revive. He regarded the pedlar gruffly, and began to scold Mrs. Antoine when she returned, though his ill humor vanished when he saw she was selling not buying. The stranger selected a number of bands, and paid for them from a chamolais-skin purse filled with gold pieces, which he took from his bosom. The Colonel's eye glittered as it fell upon it, and his manner changed perceptibly.

"Are you going on to Conflict?" he asked, as the pedlar returned the emptied gourd, which Mrs. Antoine had offered him filled with water, and stooped to take up his pack. "Yes? Well, so am I and I'll walk along with you. You look tired; just sling your pack across Sarsaparilla. I don't mind a tramp with a pleasant companion."

Mrs. Antoine looked frightened. Such condescension on the part of the Colo-

nel was, to say the least, unusual and portentous.

The next day the little Sabbath school of which Squire May had been the originator, and which held its meetings in the log school house two miles away, met at his house for a celebration. It was a pleasant sight, the children about a table-cloth spread upon the grass on which the food was laid in picnic fashion. As soon as the children were helped the Squire disappeared, and while he was gone a report of a pistol was heard. He returned in the course of an hour to say that a swing was ready, and Gus Antoine remained for some time longer tossing the little ones into the air.

On his way home, as his foot touched the little bridge which he had built across the Wild Cat for the convenience of the two families, Gus's eye was caught by an object in the ravine below. It was his father, lying half in and half out of the water, with his face covered with blood. Quick as thought he swung himself down to his side. There was a deep, round, terrible hole in his forehead, from which the blood had flowed that formed this hideous mask, and he was quite dead. The boy tried to lift him out of the water, but finding that impossible, he washed away every trace of blood from the face—no one else should see his father look like that—and then he went on toward home for help. The Missourians had nearly all gone, but Big Bill, a cousin of Mrs. Antoine's had remained after the election, and was just bidding her good-by, and remained now to render assistance.

The funeral followed soon after. As Squire May was on his way to attend it a sheriff seized him by the shoulder, and arrested him for murder. Frightened Hope ran with the news to her mother, and even beneath this crushing blow the heroic woman did not flinch. It was her arm that supported the hysterical widow as they stood together at the brink of the terrible grave, and it was Gus Antoine who comforted sobbing Hope, saying that he knew her father had not killed his, and it would be so proven.

When Mrs. Antoine heard of it she was no less positive as to the Squire's innocence, and her tears fell like rain over black the bombazine dress, which she was making over for Hope to wear at the trial.

How stifflingly hot the court-room was, packed to its utmost, with an intensely excited audience, and still they came long after Hope was certain that there was not room for another one.— She had never seen so many people before, and looking around upon them from her seat in the upper part of the room, saw only a sea of heads. She was conscious of but one individual face, that of her father, pale, but calm in front of the swaying mass. By and by the lawyers commenced talking. She felt faint; it all buzzed and hummed through her head; she could not have told a word they were saying. After what seemed to her a long while, the witnesses for the prosecution were called and Big Bill took the stand. He related the quarrel between the Colonel and Squire May at the polls, enlarging upon it and running on in a way that showed him entirely too willing a witness. Then the widow Antoine was sworn. She trembled violently, and nothing could be got from her except by questions.

"What time was it when your husband left the house?"

"Twelve o'clock," came in a frightened gasp from behind the black veil.

"How do you know it was twelve o'clock?"

"Because dinner had just been placed upon the table."

"Do you always have dinner at exactly noon?"

"No, but as he left the door I heard the whistle at Gatling's saw mill."

"Why did he leave the house just as dinner was ready?"

"He was angry because the boys were not at home, and said he would go down to the bridge and call them."

"That is sufficient," said the attorney, next calling "Master Gus Antoine." Gus came forward reluctantly, with an appealing glance toward Hope, as though he were asking her forgiveness beforehand for what he was about to say; then he looked in the same way toward Squire May, who answered his glance by an encouraging nod of the head.

"Did you attend the picnic at the house of the prisoner?"

Gus swallowed hard, pulled his jacket down strongly, and replied, "Yes, sir."

"Was the prisoner with you throughout the whole day?"

"No sir."

"At what hour did he leave you?"

"At twelve o'clock."

"How do you know it was twelve o'clock?"

"I heard the whistle at Sam Gatling's."

"Did you hear anything else remarkable soon after this and before the return of the prisoner?"

The boy's face flamed scarlet and white in streaks and patches, as though he had been struck with a whip of thongs, but he answered bravely, "Yes, sir, I heard a pistol shot."

"How do you know that it was not a shot from this carbine?"

"Because I know the noise that old shooter makes. Squire May has lent it to me often to hunt partridges."

"You may sit down."

Gus paid no attention to the lawyer's order, but leaning forward, eagerly addressed the judge and the jury: "May it please your Honor, and you gentlemen of the jury," he said—"Squire May smiled. 'He gets that from me,' he said to himself, for they had talked often of law and legal terms on their geological trip. 'What a fine lawyer he will make,' he thought—and you gentlemen of the jury," Gus went on, "I would like to make a few further remarks."

"If they have anything to do with facts bearing upon the case," said the judge, with a smile at the boy's attempt at forensic eloquence, "you may proceed."

"My mother and I, sir, do not believe that Squire May shot my father. We think that the murderer was a stranger from whom father had won a considerable sum of money the night before."

"The court has nothing to do," said the judge, "with what you or your mother may think or believe. The question is, can you prove anything?"

"No, sir," replied Gus. "I went down to the Union saloon and found that father had won the money from a pedlar, that the man who had lost it was desperate, but he had left the town, and no one knew where he had gone, or what was his name."

"May it please your Honor," said the prosecuting attorney, "all this seems to me utterly irrelevant, and a useless consumption of precious time."

"Have you anything further to state?" asked the judge kindly.

"No, sir," said Gus, bursting into tears, "but if this trial could be put off, though I've never seen the man, I'd track him like a bloodhound, if I had to follow him to California." And the poor boy sat down, covering his face in an agony of grief.

The discovery was nearer than he thought for a messenger pressed through the crowded room, touched Gus upon the shoulder, and whispered that he was wanted. Utterly bewildered, he rose and followed him to a low boarding-house in a disreputable part of the town. There, upon a wretched bed, a man lay dying. In a drunken condition he had fallen from a high bridge, and his skull was broken in several places. Father Murphy, the Catholic priest, had heard his confession, and was now committing it to writing. He did not look up or speak as Gus entered, but went steadily on with his work. A pedlar's pack lay open upon a chair, and Gus Antoine's sharp eyes detected an object which made him start forward and seize it. It was the strip of embroidery which Hope had made. He had found the man he sought.

Father Murphy, who had signed and certified the paper, handed it at this instant to Gus. Its purpose was, that having been ruined in play by Colonel Antoine, he had waited for and shot him in Wild Cat Hollow. His money, which he got from the murdered man, he now left to the church, and he prayed for the forgiveness of those whom he had injured. Gus turned to grant it, but the hand that had committed the crime had stiffened upon a crucifix, and with the word *Peccati* upon his lips the soul had gone.

"Then Gus turned to Father Murphy. 'Come quick to the court house,' he said. 'We may be too late now.'"

And with the confession in one hand