

The Star,

And Conception Bay Weekly Reporter.

VOL III

HARBOR GRACE NEWFOUNDLAND, MAY 6, 1875

NUM. XLVIII

AN INTERESTING TALE. TWO KISSES.

A long stretch of hard road, the noonday sun streaming down on it with fervent heat. Slowly plodding his way along it was a boy—a boy who was dusty and tired.

But though the road was dry and hot and uncomfortable, to the right and left were fields red with clover-blossoms. They were such a contrast to the road that the boy felt as if he wanted to get over there and lie down and sleep with the fragrance about him. Presently he came to a place where a tree stood just within the field.

I will rest a little while under it, he said; and climbing the fence, he sat down in the leafy shade.

A cool breeze fanned his forehead as he removed his cap. Far off he could hear the low of cattle and the song of labourers. There was no cloud in the sky above. All nature seemed smiling beneath the blessing of heaven.

Presently the rustle of the leaves, above the boy's head grew almost inaudible to him; the hum of the bees in the clover seemed to re-echoe further and further; finally, his head dropped over on his arm, and he was sound asleep.

The face of the sleeper was a handsome one; but it was pale, and it had lines in it too firm for his years. That he had both intellect and will was apparent at a glance. He was about 15 years old.

He had slept, perhaps for an hour, when the sound of carriage-wheels awoke him. He raised himself to a sitting posture, hardly realizing where he was. The carriage stopped. It contained, besides the driver only one occupant—a little girl about three years younger than the boy.

Are you ill? asked the sweetest voice in the world, as a lovely face peeped out between the curtains of the carriage. I thought you might be, when I saw you lying there, and so I told James to stop.

No, thank you, answered the lad, blushing; and, springing to his feet he advanced to the side of the carriage. I was only resting. I think I must have fallen asleep.

There was a short pause. The boy looked at the girl's face in undisguised admiration. Never had he seen anything so beautiful; never had he met any one so exquisitely dressed. It was like a vision out of Paradise. He glanced down on his travel-soiled garments, and then at her snowy muslin, so spotlessly clean.

Ah! he said to himself, she is some rich man's daughter! and I—I have only the bundle I carry over my shoulder, and a few dollars in my pocket. The girl blushed under his fixed gaze but her eyes melted with pity.

You look tired, she said. If you are going our way, won't you get in? She moved as she spoke to make room for him. It is five miles yet before we reach home.

His face flushed, and he was on the point of declining but a smile from the young girl decided it—he got in and the carriage rolled along.

For awhile there was silence. At last the young girl with another sweet smile, turned to him and said, will you tell me your name?

She was, you see, three years younger than the boy, but she was already infinitely more self-possessed.

It is Bret Gray, he answered. And mine is Claudie Wilberforce, she said. I hope we shall be good friends. Have you far to go?

I am going to Philadelphia, he replied.

Why, that's a hundred miles off, Claudie cried. You don't mean to walk all the way?

I have walked a hundred miles already, he said simply. Claudie paused awhile.

You must have some great thing in view she said, to make you walk such a distance.

Her brown eyes were wide open with surprise. His gray ones met them without flinching. Somehow, in the presence of this girl the boy was not shy, as he usually was.

My object is not a very strange one, he said, bravely. I want to make a man of myself.

Have you a home? I have had a home, and a very pleasant one, but—

He stopped, embarrassed. Why don't your father send you to college? My brothers go to college.

My father and mother are both dead, Bret answered with a quiver in his voice.

I am so sorry, said Claudie and put her hand in his. The tears rose to her eyes.

I never remember seeing them, continued the lad. I have lived all my life with my uncle. He is not rich—and has boys of his own.

I see, I see, said Claudie; and so you are setting out, like Whittington, to make your fortune.

I don't know that I shall ever make a fortune at least one like that which Whittington made, answered the boy with simple frankness. It is not money that I care for most. I want a chance for improvement. I tried to do my duty at uncle's, but, for all that, I did not like the plough and the hoe. It was books—books that I wanted. I felt that I must go to some place where knowledge could be obtained, where there were free libraries, and where there was a chance for one that was willing to work, and to study when not working. Franklin you know did that.

Bret's face glowed with enthusiasm as he spoke. His listener caught the infection, her eyes kindled and her little hand pressed his in sympathy.

Uncle at first didn't want me to go away; he was afraid I couldn't get on but when he saw I was in earnest he gave in to me. I shall never forget his kindness—never!

Claudie's cheeks kindled as she looked at Bret. Here was a real hero! She had read of such things. But to see one!

She was roused by the carriage stopping, and James asking, shall I drive in, miss?

You will stop and take dinner with us, said Claudie addressing Bret's father and mother, I know, will be glad to see you.

No thank you, said the lad preparing to get out. I dined two hours ago. I am very much obliged. Good-bye!

Good-bye! said Claudie. You will be a great man yet, she added enthusiastically.

Bret hesitated. He was now in the road, outside the carriage door, but he still held her hand. He looked down, hesitated, then raised his eyes to her face.

You think so? Will you help me to become one? Will you give me a kiss?

Claudie blushed scarlet. But she was no common child; in some things she was far ahead of her years.

Yes, if you wish it, she said frankly. If you think it will do you any good.

She stepped forward as she spoke and her lips met his. What made the heart of both thrill? What was it, in that kiss, which kept the memory of this day alive, in Claudie, for years?

A moment later they had parted. Bret had opened the gate, and the carriage was driving up the avenue. Would they meet again?

Good-bye! good-bye! called the girl gaily looking back, and waving her hand.

But there were tears in her eyes, and in Bret's also.

* * * * *

Ten years had passed, when one afternoon in summer, a young man stopped at the Arcadian Springs, and entered his name in the book of the hotel, in a large fine hand.—Bret Gray.

Ah! said the landlord, I am proud to have you as a guest, I have read your writings, sir. This way, please. Jim show this gentleman to No. 4. One of our best rooms; sir; but nothing is too good for you.

It was our old acquaintance, whom we had left a boy on the roadside, going up to the great city to seek his fortune.

At first, he found the battle a hard one

and if he had been less brave and persistent, he might have abandoned the fight. He began as an errand boy in a printing office; then he became compositor; then tried his hand at writing short articles for the newspapers on which he worked. His evenings he spent in study, availing himself of the advantages which Philadelphia offers, in its free schools, its Apprentices' Libraries, its Academy of Fine Arts, its Academy of Natural Sciences, and its scores of similar institutions, to those who desire to be self-educated. We will not however follow him in his long struggle.

At twenty-five he was the editor of an influential newspaper; a popular lecturer and the envied author of more than one book of mark.

In all these years had he never thought of Claudie? Often and often especially at first. But the battle of life, fought as he had to fight, is an exhausting one; it engrosses every thought, exhausts every nerve; leaves the combatant little leisure for aught but the strain and stress of the fight. Gradually as the years went by, the image of Claudie grew less and less distinct until finally he had come to think of her only as some beautiful vision, in a dream in a far, far off country.

Occasionally, however, her image would come back to him as vividly as ever. The scent of the clover or the hum of the bees, would call it up, and he would see again the hot, dusty road, hear the carriage-wheels and behold that lovely face looking out between the curtains.

Ah! he would say to himself, she is married—long ago, rich, beautiful, refined—she has forgotten me.

Your house seems quite full, landlord, said Bret Gray, when he had refreshed himself with a bath, and had descended to supper. The landlord was waiting obsequiously at the door of the dining room. A fine company I am told you have always.

Yes answered the host, rubbing his hands together. Some very handsome ladies are here. We generally have a dozen or two belles every summer. But to-morrow—tomorrow, sir, the most beautiful of all is coming. Let me see! I will give you a seat here, next to the place I have reserved for her: that is the highest compliment I can pay you, sir.

Who is this paragon? said Bret carelessly, as he took his seat.

Miss Wilberforce, daughter of Judge Wilberforce, of Northampton.

Wilberforce!—Wilberforce!—surely I have heard of that name before, said Bret to himself. Ah, I remember! The colour rose to his cheek, man as he was and his heart beat fast.

Do you know the lady's Christian name? he asked.

Claudie, I think. Yes it is Claudie, I am sure? Do you know her?

I knew her when I was a mere boy. But I have not seen her for ten years. She has probably forgotten me.

Bret ate his meal in silence hardly noticing anything, though a score of eyes were directed curiously towards him, for the landlord had taken care to let it be known who his new guest was. Bret could think of nothing but Claudie. All his old feelings revived, and with ten-fold vigor; for they were now the feelings of a man, not of a boy.

I wonder why she has not married he said to himself; and a wild, romantic explanation suggested itself. Pshaw! he cried, immediately, however. Am I a fool? She forgot me, probably before a month had passed.

Then he found himself wondering if Miss Wilberforce was at all like the little girl he had met and parted with ten years ago. He fell asleep that night dreaming of Claudie.

Bret Gray was not in the house when Miss Wilberforce arrived the next day. He had been out rambling and, returning, thought he would sit in the back verandah while he rested. That verandah was a very pleasant place. Vines clambering up the sides; it was deliciously cool and shady. The fragrance of flower filled the air. Suddenly as he sat there a light step came round the corner. He glanced up, and saw a tall stylishly dressed young lady and a face that he recognised on the instant. The same sweet smile, was there as of

old, and the same expression only far more mature.

Bret rose and bowed. Miss Wilberforce, he exclaimed extending his hand. I have not forgotten you.

Claudie at first did not recognize him.

I beg your pardon, she said but extending her hand nevertheless. I cannot recall your name.

I did not suppose you would, Bret returned. But ten years ago you asked a tired boy to ride in your carriage with you. Do you remember? He has never forgotten it.

What? she cried. Are you Bret—Bret Gray—Mr. Gray? she said, correcting herself, and blushing in some confusion. Then she added quickly, you see I have not forgotten you name even if I have your face. But no wonder I did not recognize you. Ten years have changed you wonderfully.

I told you, you know, you would be a great man. Indeed, and she shook hands again frankly. I am very glad to meet you.

Then she sat down by him. Beautiful Claudie! Bret thought she had more than fulfilled the promise of her childhood's loveliness.

This is a pleasure I little dreamed of Bret said. I hadn't hoped that you would be as good as to remember me.

She laughed frankly, just as she did when a child.

You interested me strangely, she said. You seemed so resolute and strong. I recognised your name the very first time I saw it in print. I believe I have read nearly everything you have written. You see I have a sort of pride in your success, I predicted it. You have always had my best wishes.

Still the same enthusiastic, outspoken Claudie as of old!

Bret gazed at her with increasing admiration. The conversation now ceased to be personal and ranged over a great variety of topics. Everything that was touched on, Miss Wilberforce understood; and her remarks were incisive, or sprightly, or witty, as the subject required. When she rose, in about half an hour, to go to her room, Bret was hopelessly in love.

The days passed, Bret's passion increased hourly. But though he resolved a score of times, to speak and tell his love, he always shrank from the task when the crisis arrived. Miss Wilberforce was so different from other girls, so frank and friendly, that he feared lest he might be deceiving himself, when he thought, as he sometimes did that she was not indifferent to him, then she had such crowds of suitors and so high in social rank and so wealthy that even he, famous as he was in literature, did not dare to hope too much.

One day she said to him, as they rose together from the breakfast-table—I am going home to-morrow.

To-morrow! cried Bret, as if a bullet had struck him. To-morrow!

Yes. I never stay here longer than four weeks, and it will be four weeks to-morrow since I came.

I had not thought it had been so long, answered Bret, half dazed.

At that instant one of her acquaintances came up and placing her arm within Claudie's, carried her off leaving Bret standing there, dumb with consternation, like one suddenly turned to stone.

He soon recovered himself and, putting on his hat plunged into the forest to walk off his emotion.

Going! And to-morrow! he repeated. I will put everything at the hazard of the die, then, to-day, if I can but find her alone. But what hope is there? How calmly she spoke of going! If she loved me—

He could not go on. The thought was too painful. Life had come to be worthless to Bret Gray, you see, if Claudie was not to love him.

He had been out on the mountain for two hours, when, approaching the hotel on his return, fate granted him the interview he so desired.

There was a little pond stocked with water lilies, and surrounded with trees about half a mile from the house. This was a favorite resort of Claudie's though it was too far for most ladies to walk. The proprietor had imparted some

swans, in order to add to the attractions of the spot; and, as Bret descended the mountain, and approached the lake he saw Claudie sitting on the opposite bank, lost in a reverie, and not even now noticing a swan that she had coaxed at first, to come to her, by feeding it.

We will not deny that the hope of finding Miss Wilberforce in this secluded spot had led Bret's steps in that direction. His heart leaped to his throat now. He paused for a moment saying to himself that she was as stately and pure as the swan, admiring her graceful willow figure, and wondering what she could be thinking of so intently.

Suddenly she gave a start and scream the latter cut short as soon as begun. Some object close by her had attracted her attention. It was something that filled her with horror for her eyes dilated, and she shuddered; but nevertheless, it seemed impossible for her to remove her gaze. Bret was not long before he discovered the cause of her terror.

On the bank near her in full sight coiled as if about to spring, with head erect and blazing orbs, and with open mouth and angry fangs was a huge rattlesnake!

To Bret Gray there came a single second of despair. She was so far off, and the peril was imminent? Long before he could reach her the fatal spring would be made, he said to himself. He would have to go round the head of pond which was a considerable distance and the noise of his approach would excite the reptile still more and accelerate the end. His knees gave way from pure physical weakness. Then he rallied his faculties, and sprang forward in a race for life or death, clutching nervously the stout walking stick he fortunately carried with him.

The minutes that it took to skirt the head of the pond seemed to him hours. At last he reached the other side, and with a sob of relief saw that the reptile was still watching his victim who sat fascinated and terror-struck unable to move.

Thank God! he cried involuntarily. The words, or the noise of his approach, startled the rattlesnake, which sprang at once, with head extended at Claudie. But quiet as the serpent was Bret was quicker. One leap carried him to Claudie's side, and at the same instant his heavy walking stick descending on the reptile in the very act of springing. The rattlesnake fell to the earth writhing, where a few rapid blows soon despatched it.

It was all over in a very brief space. When Bret, having killed the serpent, turned to Claudie, he found she had sunk fainting on the bank.

Bret knelt by her, chafing her hands, and calling her by a dozen fond, endearing epithets. Directly the colour came back to her cheeks.

Oh! she said, faintly, opening her eyes. What a horrid dream! Then, seeing Bret, she remembered all. She covered her eyes with her hands. The horrible monster! she gasped. Is it indeed dead?

Yes darling, Thank God, I was near!

She put her hand in Bret's. You have saved my life, she said. How can I ever repay you?

The blow that would have slain you, would have killed me also, said Bret. I nearly died, as it was, in that awful moment, on the other side of the pond, when I first saw your danger.

Her eyes met his. She read all his heart in them.

You are dearer to me than my own life, he cried.

Claudie, he said, directly, as she nestled closer to him in the sweet happy feeling of a first love that is acknowledged at last.

She raised her eyes softly to his. You kissed me once, he whispered. I have felt that kiss on my lips a thousand times since. It was the star that led me on to success. It was what his lady's guerdon was to a knight of old. Kiss me again darling if you really love me.

She raised herself in his arms and their lips met for the second time. The first had been the kiss of an impulsive girl that hardly meant anything unless a little pity and sympathy; but this was the kiss of a matured woman, and it meant love perfect love for evermore.

I know now, she whispered, hiding her face on his broad chest, why I never could love any one of my many suitors. In my secret heart, unknown even to myself I have loved you all along.

This is our story of Two Kisses.