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THE MOB-CAP.*

OR, MY GRANDMOTHER'S TRUNK.

By Mrs. Caroline Lee Hentz.

When it was known that Mrs. Stanley's dwelling house was advertised for sale, to satisfy the demands of impatient creditors, there was much astonishment and more sorrow, for she was a woman universally beloved for her meekness, loving-kindness and tender charities. The neighbors gathered in to question and console, and great was the sympathy expressed for Clara's inconsolable grief. They did not know the secret burden that weighed her to the dust, and wondered much to see the young and elastic bowed down so heavily, while Mrs. Stanley seemed so calm and resigned. Fanny Morton was very sorry, and expressed herself on the occasion with all the depth of feeling of which her tranquil nature was capable, but Edward more than ever felt the immeasurable distance of their souls. Hers could not comprehend the depth and sensibility of his. The lightning of heaven, and the cold phosphorescent light of earth, are not more different in their properties. Mrs. Clifton came, but not with the crowd. She waited till others accused her of standing aloof from her favorites in their day of adversity. She came alone, leaving her carriage, her servants, and all the paraphernalia of her wealth behind her. Mrs. Stanley knew how to appreciate this delicacy, as well as the added deference and respect of her manners. She asked no questions—she added no condolence—she came, she said, to solicit a favor, not to confer one. She wished to become purchaser of their beautiful cottage, whose situation she had so much admired. She had learned that her father had desired to become the owner of the lot, if Mr. Stanley ever disposed of it. She was anxious herself that it should not pass into other hands, and to secure their continuance in the neighborhood.

'If by gratifying my father's known wish,' continued Mrs. Clifton, her brilliant eyes softened by visible emotion, 'I can relieve you, Mrs. Stanley, from, I trust, a transient embarrassment, I shall not consider myself less your debtor—when the time comes that you desire to reclaim it, I will not withhold its restoration.'

The tears, which sorrow had not wrung from Mrs. Stanley's eyes, now fell fast, from gratitude. She pressed Mrs. Clifton's hand in hers, and said, in a low voice, 'You have caused the widow's heart to sing for joy—may heaven reward you for your kindness.'

Clara, incapable of restraining herself longer, threw her arms round her neck, and sobbed out, 'Oh, madam, you have saved me from despair.'

Mrs. Clifton, who attributed her words to the natural regret of a young and ardent heart, on the prospect of quitting the home of childhood, warmly returned the involuntary embrace, and bid her call back her smiles, and be ready to accompany her on the morrow on a botanical excursion. When she rose to depart, Edward rose also to accompany her home. He was no longer gloomy and reserved. He no longer looked upon her as an enchantress, moving high above him, in a region of inaccessible light and splendor, but as a woman, endowed with all the warm and lovely sensibilities of her sex—a being whom he might dare to love, though he could never hope to obtain,—who might forgive the homage, even though she rejected the worshipper. Had not the humility, always the accompaniment of deep and fervent passion, ruled his perceptions, he might have derived an inspiration for his hopes, from the softened language of her eyes—a language which others had not been slow in translating. They entered the magnificent saloon.—The contrast its still gilded walls presented to the agitating scene they had left, was felt by both.

'Desolate is the dwelling of Morrir,' said she, in an accent half sad and half sportive,—'silence is in the house of her fathers.'

'Dwells there no joy in song, white hand of the harp of Lutha?' continued Edward, in the same poetic language, and drawing the harp towards her. It is always delightful to find the train of our own thoughts pursued by a friend—proving that we think in unison. Mrs. Clifton felt this as she swept her hands over the chords, and called forth that sweet and impassioned melody peculiar to the daughters of Italy. She paused, and her dark eye rested a moment on the face of her auditor. It was partly shaded by his hand, and she saw that he was overcome by some powerful emotion. Again she sang, but her voice was low, and she ceased at length, as if weary of the effort.

'You seem spell bound by the genius of silence,' said she, 'I should be wrong to break the charm.'

'I know I must appear more than stupid,' replied he, 'when there is every thing around to inspire me. But my feelings have

been deeply oppressed by anxiety, and the weight of anxiety has been removed by a debt of gratitude, which, however pleasing and gracefully imposed, is only too deeply felt.'

'Oh! let not your pride be jealous of the happiness I have dared this day to purchase. What have I done for you and yours, half—half so precious to your remembrance, as to mine? Your sister's tearful blessing, your mother's hallowed prayer!'

She spoke with such fervor and sensibility, and her countenance was lighted up with such an exalted expression, Edward was scarcely able to restrain the impetuous impulses of passion that urged him on. The confession trembled on his lips, but pride and poverty, two stern monitors, stood by his side, and forbade the avowal of his madness and presumption.

'No!' said he to himself, 'let me live on in the silence and secrecy of hopeless devotion, rather than by unguarded rashness risk the loss of that confidence so dangerous, yet so delightful. She allows me to be her friend. Let me never dare aspire to more.'

Thus reasoned Edward Stanley, and thus he schooled the language of his lips—but the passion denied utterance in words, flashed from his eyes, and modulated every accent of his voice. He looked back upon this evening, passed alone with Mrs. Clifton, amidst the breathings of poetry and music, and exulted in the reflection that he had not committed himself by any act of imprudence he might hereafter vainly rue. Sometimes his feelings rose up against Clara, for the selfish vanity that had led her to sacrifice the fortune that might have placed him above the suspicion of mercenary motives, but her unappeasable sorrow for her transgression, would not allow him to cherish any resentment towards her. Sometimes too his conscience reproached him for the part he was acting towards Fanny, the idol of his boyish fancy—but every hour passed in her presence, convinced him that she looked upon him more as a brother than a lover, and wrapped in a mantle of constitutional indifference, she seemed scarcely aware of the wandering of his heart.

'Oh! I am so glad you are not going to leave us! I do not know how I should live without you and Clara.'

Fanny's most ardent expression in joy and sorrow, was, 'I am so glad—I am so sorry.' It was a great deal for her to say—but she looked at Clara exactly as she did at him, and Edward, whose heart was now enlightened, felt that she did not love him, and he rejoiced in the conviction.

One evening, just between twilight and darker hour, he was returning from a long walk, when, a little before he left the woodland path, that led into the public road, he met an old woman muffled in a cloak and hood—he bowed and was passing on, when she accosted him in a voice which was not known, and approaching nearer to her, he knew by the spectacles gleaming through the shades, under the deeper shade of a mob-cap, his ancient friend of the stage coach, and he greeted her with great cordiality. She told him she was travelling about as usual, and had stopped in the village to make a visit to Mrs. Clifton, the grand daughter of her old friend.

'It is growing dark and late,' said he, 'let me see you safe to her house, for you have mistaken the path that leads to it.'

'Stop a moment,' cried she, 'if you are not in too much haste, and let me rest on this log by the way side. I am old, and it wearies me to walk fast. Sit down, young man, and let me ask after your welfare. I have not forgotten your kindness to the aged, nor ever shall I.'

Edward brushed the dust from the log with his handkerchief, and preparing a seat for her, with great reverence placed himself at her side.

'Come,' said she, 'I must soon be gone, but I want to know if I can serve you. I am an eccentric old creature, but I am well off in the world, and when I die, I cannot carry my money into the grave. I am told there is a pretty young girl in the neighborhood, whom you love, and would marry, if you were not poor. Do not blush to own it, for if it is so, and I can make you happy by my means, I shall bless the hour that brought us together, even near the end of my pilgrimage.'

Her tremulous voice faltered, and she raised her handkerchief under her spectacles.

'Thank you, a thousand times, for your generous offer,' replied Edward, much moved, 'but indeed madam, you are misinformed. I would not marry, if I could.'

'Young man,' cried she, 'you are not sincere. The heart craves for a kindred heart. You would not live alone. Confide in me, and I will not betray you. Trifle with me, and you may lose a friend, whose professions are not lightly made. Tell me, do you not love the fair girl, whom they call the beauty of the vil-

lage, or is it but a passing rumor that has reached my ears?'

Edward wondered at the interest this singular old woman expressed in his destiny, but he did not doubt its sincerity, and he would not repay it with dissimulation.'

'No, madam, I do not love her, otherwise than with brotherly kindness. Where I do love, I cannot hope, and all your generosity cannot avail me there.'

'Where?' said she. I want no half confidences. The imagination of age is dull to that of youth. Tell me all, or nothing.'

'There is one, then, with whom, were she poor, beggary would be a paradise, but whom fortune has placed so far beyond my reach, it would be madness to name, and presumption, to aspire to. Sometimes, emboldened by her condescension, I have dared to think, had my lot been different—but no—it can never be—I need not say more—you know where your steps are bound.'

A silence followed this avowal, and Edward was so much absorbed by his own feelings, as almost to forget the presence of his companion. At length she spoke.

'I do not see the great presumption of your hopes: if you mean the widow Clifton, I see nothing to make her beyond your reach, unless you choose yourself to put her up in the clouds. She is rich, it is true, but what does she want of riches in another? She has found no joy in wealth. I know the history of her marriage: it was not voluntary on her part, and brought no happiness—a state of splendid bondage. Why do you not at least learn from her, whether your love is hopeless? If I—an old woman—if my heart warmed towards you, the first moment I saw you, is her young bosom made of stone, that it cannot be melted, or impressed?'

'She has often spoken,' said Edward, finding an increasing fascination in the subject, and drawing still nearer his aged friend, 'of the loneliness of her destiny, and of the insufficiency of wealth to satisfy the cravings of the heart. These wild dreams dazzled my imagination, and gild the future with hues of heaven. But the dread of being laughed from her presence, of incurring the displeasure of one who has been the benefactress of our family—you, who are now in the winter of your days, can have no conception of the strength of these mental conflicts—this warring of fire and ice.'

'I have not forgotten the memories of youth,' she answered; 'and impassive as you believe me, there is an image cherished in my breast, whose traits the waves of oblivion can never efface, nor the snows of age ever chill. Few can love as I have loved; and love with me, is immortal as the divine spark that lights up this perishing frame.'

She leaned trembling against the shoulder of Edward, who reproached himself for calling up emotions so sublime in their strength, thus glowing and triumphant, amidst the ruins of beauty and youth. He drew her cloak more closely around her, and warned her that the night dew was falling.

'You are right,' said she, rising; 'I was forgetting I am not young like you.'

They walked slowly on, in the direction of Mrs. Clifton's house.

'May I not ask the name of the friend, to whose kindness I am so much indebted?' cried he.

'Oh,' replied she, laughing, 'I thought every body knew Aunt Bridget; for I am one of those universal aunts, whom every body knows, and no body cares for. My property is my own, and I have a right to bequeath it wherever I please. I have chosen you as my heir, and you may consider yourself equal in fortune to widow Clifton, or any other widow in the land: Not a word of thanks—no gratitude at least, till legal measures are taken to secure it to your possession.'

'Singular and generous being,' said Edward, beginning to believe that her brain was somewhat unsound, 'what have I done to excite so romantic an interest, and what can I do to prove myself worthy of it?'

'Be sincere—truth is the only bond of love, and concealment with friends is falsehood.'

They had now reached the gate of the avenue.

'You will not go in?'

'No,' said he, 'I cannot see her to night; to-morrow, perhaps, shall I see you then?'

'I cannot tell what the morrow will bring forth. But one thing let me say, young man, ere we part. You must plead your own cause, and not expect it will be done by me. If you have not moral courage and manly spirit sufficient to meet the consequences, whatever they may be, you merit the downfall of your hopes, and humiliation of your pride.'

* Concluded from our last.