

VIII. THE LITTLE BROWN BOOK OF MISS EMILY

The first summer Mr. Irving and Miss Lavendar--Diana and I could never call her anything else, even after she was married--were at Echo Lodge after their marriage, both Diana and I spent a great deal of time with them. We became acquainted with many of the Grafton people whom we had not known before, and among others, the family of Mr. Mack Leith. We often went up to the Leiths in the evening to play croquet. Millie and Margaret Leith were very nice girls, and the boys were nice, too. Indeed, we liked every one in the family, except poor old Miss Emily Leith. We tried hard enough to like her, because she seemed to like Diana and me very much, and always wanted to sit with us and talk to us, when we would much rather have been somewhere else. We often felt a good deal of impatience at these times, but I am very glad to think now that we never showed it.

In a way, we felt sorry for Miss Emily. She was Mr. Leith's old-maid sister and she was not of much importance in the household. But, though we felt sorry for her, we couldn't like her. She really was fussy and meddlesome; she liked to poke a finger into every one's pie, and she was not at all tactful. Then, too, she had a sarcastic tongue, and seemed to feel bitter towards all the young folks and their love affairs. Diana and I thought this was because she had never had a lover of her own.

Somehow, it seemed impossible to think of lovers in connection with Miss Emily. She was short and stout and pudgy, with a face so round and fat and red that it seemed quite featureless; and her hair was scanty and gray. She walked with a waddle, just like Mrs. Rachel Lynde, and she was always rather short of breath. It was hard to believe Miss Emily had ever been young; yet old Mr. Murray, who lived next door to the Leiths, not only expected us to believe it, but assured us that she had been very pretty.

"THAT, at least, is impossible," said Diana to me.

And then, one day, Miss Emily died. I'm afraid no one was very sorry. It seems to me a most dreadful thing to go out of the world and leave not one person behind to be sorry because you have gone. Miss Emily was dead and buried before Diana and I heard of it at all. The first I knew of it was when I came home from Orchard Slope one day and found a queer, shabby little black horsehair trunk, all studded with brass nails, on the floor of my room at Green Gables. Marilla told me that Jack Leith had brought it over, and said that it had belonged to Miss Emily and that, when she was dying, she asked them to send it to me.

"But what is in it? And what am I to do with it?" I asked in bewilderment.

"There was nothing said about what you were to do with it. Jack said they didn't know what was in it, and hadn't looked into it, seeing that it was your property. It seems a rather queer proceeding--but you're always getting mixed up in queer proceedings, Anne. As for what is in it, the easiest way to find out, I reckon, is to open it and see. The key is tied to it. Jack said Miss Emily said she wanted you to have it because she loved you and saw her lost youth in you. I guess she was a bit delirious at the last and wandered a good deal. She said she wanted you 'to understand her.' "

I ran over to Orchard Slope and asked Diana to come over and examine the trunk with me. I hadn't received any instructions about keeping its contents secret and I knew Miss Emily wouldn't mind Diana knowing about them, whatever they were.

It was a cool, gray afternoon and we got back to Green Gables just as the rain was beginning to fall. When we went up to my room the wind was rising and whistling through the boughs of the big old Snow Queen outside of my window. Diana was excited, and, I really believe, a little bit frightened.

We opened the old trunk. It was very small, and there was nothing in it but a big cardboard box. The box was tied up and the knots sealed with wax. We lifted it out and untied it. I touched Diana's fingers as we did it, and both of us exclaimed at

once, "How cold your hand is!"

In the box was a quaint, pretty, old-fashioned gown, not at all faded, made of blue muslin, with a little darker blue flower in it. Under it we found a sash, a yellowed feather fan, and an envelope full of withered flowers. At the bottom of the box was a little brown book.

It was small and thin, like a girl's exercise book, with leaves that had once been blue and pink, but were now quite faded, and stained in places. On the fly leaf was written, in a very delicate hand, "Emily Margaret Leith," and the same writing covered the first few pages of the book. The rest were not written on at all. We sat there on the floor, Diana and I, and read the little book together, while the rain thudded against the window panes.

June 19, 18--

I came to-day to spend a while with Aunt Margaret in Charlottetown. It is so pretty here, where she lives--and ever so much nicer than on the farm at home. I have no cows to milk here or pigs to feed. Aunt Margaret has given me such a lovely blue muslin dress, and I am to have it made to wear at a garden party out at Brighton next week. I never had a muslin dress before--nothing but ugly prints and dark

woolens. I wish we were rich, like Aunt Margaret. Aunt Margaret laughed when I said this, and declared she would give all her wealth for my youth and beauty and light-heartedness. I am only eighteen and I know I am very merry but I wonder if I am really pretty. It seems to me that I am when I look in Aunt Margaret's beautiful mirrors. They make me look very different from the old cracked one in my room at home which always twisted my face and turned me green. But Aunt Margaret spoiled her compliment by telling me I look exactly as she did at my age. If I thought I'd ever look as Aunt Margaret does now, I don't know what I'd do. She is so fat and red.

June 29.

Last week I went to the garden party and I met a young man called Paul Osborne. He is a young artist from Montreal who is boarding over at Heppoch. He is the handsomest man I have ever seen--very tall and slender, with dreamy, dark eyes and a pale, clever face. I have not been able to keep from thinking about him ever since, and to-day he came over here and asked if he could paint me. I felt very much flattered and so pleased when Aunt Margaret gave him permission. He says he wants to paint me as "Spring," standing under the poplars where a fine rain of sunshine falls through. I am to wear my blue muslin gown and a wreath of flowers on my hair.

He says I have such beautiful hair. He has never seen any of such a real pale gold. Somehow it seems even prettier than ever to me since he praised it.

I had a letter from home to-day. Ma says the blue hen stole her nest and came off with fourteen chickens, and that pa has sold the little spotted calf. Somehow those things don't interest me like they once did.

July 9.

The picture is coming on very well, Mr. Osborne says. I know he is making me look far too pretty in it, although her persists in saying he can't do me justice. He is going to send it to some great exhibition when finished, but he says he will make a little water-color copy for me.

He comes every day to paint and we talk a great deal and he reads me lovely things out of his books. I don't understand them all, but I try to, and he explains them so nicely and is so patient with my stupidity. And he says any one with my eyes and hair and coloring does not need to be clever. He says I have the sweetest, merriest laugh in the world. But I will not write down all the compliments he has paid me. I dare say he does not mean them at all.

In the evening we stroll among the spruces or sit on the bench under the acacia tree. Sometimes we don't talk at all, but I never find the time long. Indeed, the minutes just seem to fly--and then the moon will come up, round and red, over the harbor and Mr. Osborne will sigh and say he supposes it is time for him to go.

July 24.

I am so happy. I am frightened at my happiness. Oh, I didn't think life could ever be so beautiful for me as it is!

Paul loves me! He told me so to-night as we walked by the harbor and watched the sunset, and he asked me to be his wife. I have cared for him ever since I met him, but I am afraid I am not clever and well-educated enough for a wife for Paul. Because, of course, I'm only an ignorant little country girl and have lived all my life on a farm. Why, my hands are quite rough yet from the work I've done. But Paul just laughed when I said so, and took my hands and kissed them. Then he looked into my eyes and laughed again, because I couldn't hide from him how much I loved him.

We are to be married next spring and Paul says he will take me to Europe. That will be very nice, but nothing matters so long as I am with him.

Paul's people are very wealthy and his mother and sisters are very fashionable. I am frightened of them, but I did not tell Paul so because I think it would hurt him and oh, I wouldn't do that for the world.

There is nothing I wouldn't suffer if it would do him any good. I never thought any one could feel so. I used to think if I loved anybody I would want him to do everything for me and wait on me as if I were a princess. But that is not the way at all. Love makes you very humble and you want to do everything yourself for the one you love.

August 10.

Paul went home to-day. Oh, it is so terrible! I don't know how I can bear to live even for a little while without him. But this is silly of me, because I know he has to go and he will write often and come to me often. But, still, it is so lonesome. I didn't cry when he left me because I wanted him to remember me smiling in the way he liked best, but I have been crying ever since and I can't stop, no matter how hard I try. We have had such a beautiful fortnight. Every day seemed dearer and happier than the last, and now it is ended and I feel as if it could never be the same again. Oh, I am very foolish--but I love him so dearly and if I were to lose

his love I know I would die.

August 17.

I think my heart is dead. But no, it can't be, for it aches too much.

Paul's mother came here to see me to-day. She was not angry or disagreeable. I wouldn't have been so frightened of her if she had been. As it was, I felt that I couldn't say a word. She is very beautiful and stately and wonderful, with a low, cold voice and proud, dark eyes. Her face is like Paul's but without the loveableness of his.

She talked to me for a long time and she said terrible things--terrible, because I knew they were all true. I seemed to see everything through her eyes. She said that Paul was infatuated with my youth and beauty but that it would not last and what else I to give him? She said Paul must marry a woman of his own class, who could do honor to his fame and position. She said that he was very talented and had a great career before him, but that if he married me it would ruin his life.

I saw it all, just as she explained it out, and I told her at last that I would not marry Paul, and she might tell him so.

But she smiled and said I must tell him myself, because he would not believe any one else. I could have begged her to spare me that, but I knew it would be of no use. I do not think she has any pity or mercy for any one. Besides, what she said was quite true.

When she thanked me for being so REASONABLE I told her I was not doing it to please her, but for Paul's sake, because I would not spoil his life, and that I would always hate her. She smiled again and went away.

Oh, how can I bear it? I did not know any one could suffer like this!

August 18.

I have done it. I wrote to Paul to-day. I knew I must tell him by letter, because I could never make him believe it face to face. I was afraid I could not even do it by letter. I suppose a clever woman easily could, but I am so stupid. I wrote a great many letters and tore them up, because I felt sure they wouldn't convince Paul. At last I got one that I thought would do. I knew I must make it seem as if I were very frivolous and heartless, or he would never believe. I spelled some words wrong and put in some mistakes of grammar on purpose. I told him I had just been flirting with him,

and that I had another fellow at home I liked better. I said FELLOW because I knew it would disgust him. I said that it was only because he was rich that I was tempted to marry him.

I thought would my heart would break while I was writing those dreadful falsehoods. But it was for his sake, because I must not spoil his life. His mother told me I would be a millstone around his neck. I love Paul so much that I would do anything rather than be that. It would be easy to die for him, but I don't see how I can go on living. I think my letter will convince Paul.

I suppose it convinced Paul, because there was no further entry in the little brown book. When we had finished it the tears were running down both our faces.

"Oh, poor, dear Miss Emily," sobbed Diana. "I'm so sorry I ever thought her funny and meddling."

"She was good and strong and brave," I said. "I could never have been as unselfish as she was."

I thought of Whittier's lines,

"The outward, wayward life we see
The hidden springs we may not know."

At the back of the little brown book we found a faded water-color sketch of a young girl--such a slim, pretty little thing, with big blue eyes and lovely, long, rippling golden hair. Paul Osborne's name was written in faded ink across the corner.

We put everything back in the box. Then we sat for a long time by my window in silence and thought of many things, until the rainy twilight came down and blotted out the world.