

The steam of the locomotive billowed along the length of our train car. A very exuberant car at that. Red velvet and rich mahogany lined the walls with a gleam that only a high polish could achieve. The seats were plush and pillowed with the same royal red velvet as the walls.

"Father, why must I marry this man?" I hated the idea of my hand being offered up to a complete stranger.

"Come now Child. We've discussed this. You remember Christopher. He's not a stranger." Father patted my hand. "The two of you were inseparable back in the day."

I rolled my eyes. "We were ten." I replied. "It was a single summer. I wouldn't say that makes us life long friends. Or soulmates." I grumbled under my breath.

I laid my head back against the pillowed seat and stared longingly out the window. Anything to take my mind off of meeting my soon to be husband. I wrung my hands in my handkerchief. Nerves wound through me like a knotted thread. I knew this was how things worked among those with status but I sure in the hell didn't have to like it.

I came from wealth, old money as they like to call it. My family worked hard to obtain it, don't get me wrong, but generations have now lived off the backs of that hard work. Money ran through our veins like water through a spigot. My father likes to call himself a fisherman, but he owns one of the largest ship fleets in the world. His father and his father's father all cornered the market on anything that sailed the Atlantic and Indian oceans. If it swam and could be caught in a box or net, it was most likely brought to market by one of our family's boats. If you needed to migrate to the United States you probably came across on one of our ships. Father's idea of a "fisherman" is very loose. I think he calls himself that as a way of humility. If you looked at him, you wouldn't think he came from money. He's average, meager, but always well pressed and clean; and will most likely have a well stuffed billfold. Mother on the other hand, she was a ways dressed in the newest fashions. maybe not the best fabrics, but you would definitely see it Paris catalogs. Myself, well I'm somewhere in the middle. I like nice things. I was raised with a silver spoon but I like the tarnished edges it can develop. My hair is often a mess, at my mother's chagrin. My dresses are last years patterns with a touch of myself in each one. I enjoy the opulence of wealth but I hate flaunting it. It's rude and pretentious.

Now my soon to be husband was somewhat of a mystery to me. Christopher Montgomery was the largest railroad builder on the eastern side of the Rockies. His family had been cut from the same well made cloth as my own but unlike our old wealth, his family came from new. They only became well to do after the railroad boom. laying track after track assisting the country in its expansion. I have met his parents on numerous occasions but he

was never included. They were nice enough people. Very proper with an edge of tacky. His father was very intelligent, I could see how he made such a vast wealth so quickly. He was the refined edge to his wife's somewhat loose personality. While he was the well kept, pencil pusher. She was the brightly colored silks and flamboyant hair pieces.

I groaned at the thought of what Christopher could possibly be like. Was he going to be the starched white shirt of his father, or the slightly intoxicated looseness of his mother? Which side of the coin would he land on? I feared either side would be excruciating.

"I can't wait to see what Christopher this of our Ruth." Mother exclaimed. "Can you, William?"

Mother's eyes were beaming with excitement. She had been chattering about this meeting for weeks and as the days passed, her smile spread ever so slightly closer to her ears. I had told her on a few occasions that I thought she should be the one to marry Christopher. She would scold me and tell me how lucky I was to be wanted by such a wonderful young man.

Mother continued with her gushing. "He is going to just burst when he sees what a woman, Ruthie has become. She will make the most beautiful bride."

"Mother, you do realize that I'm sitting right here, don't you?" I squeezed my handkerchief ever so slightly.

"Well, of course I do," Mother huffed. "I was just trying to pass the time. I don't know why you're getting so upset."

Father patted my leg and gave me a wry smile. He knew how my mother was and also knew how much she drove me crazy.

The locomotive came to a squealing halt. People bustled outside the windows as the train station came into view. Women yelled for their children, and their children yelled with delight at the sight of the large train. Fellow passengers began to collect their belongings to leave the train.

As I gathered a small purse and my beaded shawl, my father bundled up my mother's belongings.

"Gregory stated that Christopher will be meeting us at the hotel this evening. He has business to attend to prior." Father said.

Mother gasped. "You mean he isn't meeting us at the station?"

"He's a busy man." Father relied.

"You would think that meeting his future bride would be more important than business."

Father grabbed mother's hand. "Now Mary, you know it takes a lot of work to run a railroad company. Why don't we get settled in the hotel. It will be evening before you know it."

Father used us both off of the train. A young man followed behind us with a cart brimming with our bags.

All I could think of was the sweet relief I felt at the idea of not seeing Christopher right away. The more time I had before being face to face with my suitor the better. I had been dreading the moment since my father announced the arrangement six months prior. According to my mother, the idea had been in the works well before Christopher and I had even hit puberty. Now that I had finally (as my mother so aguishly puts it), finished University. I had nothing else stopping me from marrying. Christopher's parents felt I was a very suitable match for their son. I imagine our family's wealth didn't hurt either.

From what I remember of ten year old Christopher, he wasn't that bad looking but he wasn't a heartthrob either. Honestly how much of a heartthrob could a ten year old boy be? He had cooties and pulled my hair. How was i suppose to see him as anything but annoying? He had been a few inches taller than me with a slender, gangly stature. His hair was a flaxen color that were matched closely by his hazel eyes. He was shy at the beginning of summer, but as the days went on, his nerve grew and so did his taunting. He would intently tease me about my doll Agnes; and play keep away with her. The last thing I remember about the boy was that he stole my first kiss. The rotten thing, took my kiss. He snuck up behind me and grabbed Agnes by her collar and when i went to retrieve her, Christopher pressed his lips to mine. I didn't know what to do. I had never been kissed before and i just stood there. Stood there like a foolish little girl who had just lost her kiss to a worthless boy. Once he finished the kiss, he gingerly placed Agnes back into my hands and left. That was the last time I saw Christopher.

Father was weaving us through the tight crowd of the station. Construction was springing up around us. People hurried to their jobs, their train, and to the daily routines they most likely lived before we arrived. I rounded a corner and lost sight of my parents. I wasn't really paying attention. i was too wrapped up in the idea of marrying a stranger. I looked around and was lost in a sea of people. I went to turn back towards the train we just departed when I was met with a brick wall that closely resembled a man's chest.

"Pardon me," the man said. He bent over to retrieve the bag I had dropped. "This must be yours."

I steadied myself and took the bag from the man's hand. I refused to look a him, as I was too embarrassed. I was such a klutz.

i mumbled out a thank you and pressed passed him. I didn't need anymore distractions and feared I wouldn't be able to find my parents. Father never mentioned where we were staying and I had never been to Chicago. It was a vast city that rivaled that of any city on the east coast. But it's vastness was what startled me. How was I going to to find my way to my parents?

“Excuse me,” a voice said. “You look lost.” It was the same man who I had run into.

“I’m fine.” I replied. My nervousness made my voice quiver and my hands shook with growing fear.

“I can help you.” The man stated. “Just tell me where you’re headed.”

I stopped and spun on my heels. I didn’t know where I was headed, and the more this man, this stranger reminded me of that just made me even angrier.

I finally looked at the stranger I bumped into. I fought to keep from making eye contact but it was impossible. The man’s hazel eyes bore into mine as they had over fifteen years ago. My breath caught at the sight of the man standing in front of me. No longer gangly and thin, but instead broad and well built. There was no mistaking that I was standing in front of Christopher. Those eyes. His piercing pale eyes. Caring but also questioning. He stood sure of himself without the air of condescension. His clothes were that of someone who worked with his hands. His sleeves were rolled up to his elbows. A small smudge of dirt rested on his cheek. His very high priced shoes were covered in dirt and mud. The look made me respect him. A man, who could make others do the work for him, chose to join in on the heavy labor.

I cleared my throat but words wouldn’t appear. My mouth choked on any resemblance of sound and I stood there just as I had when Christopher, the boy, kissed me. I was lost. lost for words. The man I had been dreading over was now standing in front of me and all I could do was stare in awe. The boy who had once tormented me for a summer now stood as a strapping man ready to help me. I quickly looked towards the ground in hopes that he wouldn’t recognize me. I didn’t know how he possibly could. The last picture he had been given was from my last day of grammar school.

My freckles had long since faded, my eyes no longer held the excitement of a teen. They now held the glossiness of an adult. My hair was still as dark and wavy but it was now pinned up into buns, not flowing down the length of my back. Would he be disappointed? Would he question his intentions of marrying me once he knew who I was? I was bright, intelligent; and by no means ugly but was I what he wanted?

“Do I know you?” he asked. He squinted ever so slightly, then recognition lit his face. A warm flush filled his cheeks and he reached for my hand. I thought to yank my hand away, but something, something deep inside me told me not to. It scolded my self doubt.

The moment Christopher’s hand touched mine. I knew.

I knew, he was to be my husband.

“Where’s Agnes.” Christopher chuckled.

“You remember her?” I croaked.

“Of course I do. She witnessed our first kiss.” Christopher smiled and gently let go of my hand. “I knew it was you.”

“And how is that?” I responded.

“Your eyes,” he replied.

“What about my eyes?” I wanted to take offense but before I had the chance, Christopher replied.

“They’re like staring into obsidian glass. Deep, wanting, ever so mysterious. Even when we were younger, your glances were hypnotizing.”

We stood inches from each other, as people rushed passed. The train bellowed its whistle in the background and all I could do was listen to his voice. His rough, but gentle voice. He remembered me. He had thought of me. I was important in a way to him. As silly as it sounds, I was memorable.

Just as I was about to question his remarks, Christopher collected me into his arms. I had no protests against it. His embrace felt natural. As if we had been in each other’s arms since we were kids. Christopher looked down with his caring wheat colored eyes and smiled.

“Will you give me your hand in marriage?”

“Don’t you already have my hand?” I replied.

“Only if you offer it freely.”

Without thinking I stood on my tiptoes and settled a kiss to Christopher’s lips.

“Yes.” I whispered.

Now before you go on to the reference photo think about how YOU picture Ruth. How do you imagine her life to be? Do a brief description or a rough sketch of her. Your video workshop will be going live March 1st! So take your time and think about how you want to see your Ruth.

Enjoy and happy imagining.

