The Tree of Life

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ABSTRACT

Charles Oldfield was a late 19th century resident in Historic Rugby, a village still preserved on Tennessee’s Cumberland Plateau. His ghost reputedly haunts the Newbury House, one of the surviving original structures in the village. Oldfield came from London to conduct business at the settlement in the Plateau. Copies of letters from Mr. Oldfield to his wife in London (she remained in London even after his death) are held in the Rugby Archives to this day. No letters from Mrs. Oldfield survived. Using the mannerisms, language, and the over the top rhetorical style from a Victorian’s perspective, Mrs. Oldfield’s identity and story have been recreated on the basis of factual evidence and are presented here as a conjectured record of the untold story of a typical Victorian woman of the time.
My family,

I am sorry for the disappointment that I have brought upon you. It saddens me to the core, knowing that Charles left a burden on me when he left this earth. Not having him here for a proper burial breaks my heart. I am sorry Mamma for not listening to you about Charles. I was young and I fell in love. Love is blinding for the eyes, even when they can see disaster right in front of them. Charles was a loving man and he cared for me. Even when Papa took to the liquor, he wanted to save me from my own pain. Not knowing that he himself would bring much more pain than Papa’s addiction to liquor. I cannot stand in front of my poor children any longer. I cannot stand the sight of their cries of hunger, when I alone can barely feed myself. Don’t be mad at me Mamma, be mad at Charles. For when he died, he dragged the last piece of my soul down with him. I love you, my family.

Your dearest daughter

Ana Oldfield
There was no possibility of taking a walk that morning. The fog was thick as cream and the morning dew was surely going to ruin the hems of her dress, but Ana did not care. She wanted freedom, she wanted to be one with nature, and mostly she craved air. Even though her mamma did not approve of such notions, Papa wanted her to be free.

‘One day Ana you will be free like a bird. When that day comes, run! Run so far and so fast that no one can catch you.’ And that she did.

‘I’ll be back!’ Ana yelled while running out the door.

‘Ana! Come back!’ Mamma started, ‘Oh leave the girl alone. Let her have fun, she is always cooped up like an animal. She is about to come of age,’ hushed Papa.

‘She should have taken a chaperone, Victor! Just think of what Mrs. Betty would say if she saw our Ana running down the streets! God forbid if she comes back looking like an animal that rolled around in mud,’ replied Mamma very harshly.

‘Speak to her then. I cannot stop you, you ungodly woman,’ said Papa as he grabbed for another bottle of liquor. ‘You make my head hurt. Speak softly like a woman should.’

‘Be quiet and go drink away your problems. You can’t take your anger out on me anymore.’

‘Oh how I wish you could, woman, but I would fear my life would be beaten out of me. I am not ready to see the ground yet!’ yelled Papa as he walked away.

‘Oh Ana. Please come back,’ whispered her Mamma while looking out of the window.

Ana flew that day. She flew so hard that Mrs. Betty fainted on her front porch. The old woman was very much intolerable and had a knack for things that were not in their proper places. As Ana rounded the corner, she skidded to a halt and looked around her. It was the same four walls that she had been living in for the past seventeen years. The same people that looked at her from under their noses.

‘Proper,’ she muttered while straightening her bodice and hat. She slowed her walk and rounded about the town square. Ana did not like the town square, because it had too many eyes; there was so much hunger.

‘Come, come! Buy a loaf of bread-‘

‘Fresh fish, come see for yourself!’

‘Ana! What in heaven’s name are you doing here?’ asked Victoria, one of Ana’s close friends.

‘I am free at last!’ Ana replied back, twirling her tattered dress that was mixed in with the dirt from running.

‘Oh Ana, I wish you truly were. Run along now, I need to sell this fruit before Papa gets back from the farm. Run!’ giggled Victoria.

Ana turned and started to pick up her pace while she clenched her book. As she was heading towards the park, all she could think of was one word, ‘Proper-‘

‘Sir, Charles has run off again. Should I bring him back?’ asked Mr. Smith, Charles’s butler.

‘No Smith, let him be. Let him breathe, he has a lot of responsibilities as it is,’ replied Lord Oldfield. ‘One day he will be overlooking all of this-‘ gesturing out of the window that looked over acres and acres of land. ‘He will need all the free time he can get.’

‘Yes sir.’ replied Mr. Smith while pouring Lord Oldfield’s afternoon tea-

‘Perfect,’ she said while sitting under a willow tree. The sun was beaming just right, and a few people were taking a stroll around the park. She opened her book and started to act like she was reading, when she was truly gazing at the people strolling. ‘So elegant, so graceful,’ she whispered as a woman in lavender strolled not too close to a gentleman.

‘What are you doing?’ asked a manly voice.

Ana looked around to come upon eyes that were staring straight at her.

‘Oh heavens! You startled me,’ she gasped while clutching her chest.

‘I am sorry. I did not mean to. Are you alright?’ the young man asked Ana with a nervous look in his eyes. Eyes that were blue as the ocean, but warm as a fireplace.

‘Yes… yes sir I am quite alright,’ she replied while rearranging her hat and tucking in her tattered hem of her dress.

‘Wonderful. May I ask, what are you reading?’ he asked curiously while holding out his hand.
'Uh… a book-' she said.

'Yes, what kind of book, though?' he persisted.

She was taken aback with his demanding hand and said quite harshly,

'Why sir… please let a lady finish speaking.'

'You are not a lady,' he muttered while turning to gaze across the park.

'Why! What a critic you are! How insolent, barbarous-' snatching the book out of her hand, he opened the cover to snicker and hand the book back to her.

'Romance. That book will bring you nothing but nonsense to your head,' he replied back with a cold tone.

'I was not reading it,' she muttered.

'What was that?' He asked while looking directly at her.

'I was not reading it, I was watching people strolling in the park,' she turned away and stared back at the engaged people.

'Not reading, huh? What is your name?' he asked.

'What is your name?' Ana bit back while still looking away.

'Charles. Charles Oldfield,' he replied back to her.

'Nice meeting you Mr. Oldfield,' she said while gathering up her book in her lap.

'What is your name?' he asked earnestly.

'My name is Ana. Ana Lewis.'

'Ana… it is nice to meet you, Miss Lewis,' said Charles as he stared off toward the distance.

As Ana turned, she really looked at Charles. She noticed that he was not just an ordinary man. He looked well dressed, with hair brown as the tree that he was laying against. Shoulders broad as a valley, and legs long as branches. Elegance that radiated from him as one would imagine from an angel.

'Are you alright, Miss Lewis?' Charles asked with concern in his eyes.

'Yes! Yes I am, thank you,' she replied back hastily. 'Oh no. Proper,' she thought to herself while blushing.

'Pink suits your skin tone,' Charles said while getting up and dusting off his pants. 'My lady?' He held out his hand to help her up.

Blushing, she laid her tiny hands in his large ones as he pulled her up with utmost grace.

'Thank you,' she whispered while blushing even more.

'Where do you live?' Charles asked while gazing at her book.

'Uh-', she stuttered. 'It is not proper to ask a lady where she lives.'

'You are not no lady,' he said while smiling a little. 'But that is OK. Would you care to meet me here again in two weeks at the same time and day? You can bring a chaperone if it will make you feel at ease,' Charles said with a glint in his eyes.

'Depends on the weather. Good day sir,' replied Ana while turning around to walk slowly away.

She did not dare look back at the barbarous man with blue eyes, but she could not help it. She turned just a little to see that her barbarous man was already walking away with his head held high like he just won at a gambling game. ‘What a barbarous man,’ Ana whispered while turning around and walking back home. Mamma would have scolded her for looking back towards a man, but she did not mind. After all, he was quite lovely to look at.
When the Big Fish Gets Caught

‘Charles! Where have you been? Your father has been worried sick about your whereabouts,’ said Charles’s mother.

‘Mother, I am here. Where is Fa-‘

‘Oh leave the poor lad alone, Ava. He needs to explore a little more in life. Come Charles! We have much to discuss,’ said Lord Oldfield as he walked back into his study room.

‘Yes sir,’ Charles replied while giving his mother a quick peck on the cheek and running upstairs.

‘Charles, my son. Mr. Smith told me you left your studies today? I see I saved you from your worried mother, so do you mind telling me where you went?’ asked Lord Oldfield.

‘I went for some air Father, nothing more,’ Charles replied while sitting down and looking around his Father’s study room. Those four walls, the same four walls that were suffocating him since he was a child.

‘Charles, you cannot just run around like a child anymore. You have responsibilities, and duties that you have to focus on. If Mr. Smith did not see you leaving, what state would your mother be in right now? Hysteria, that’s what she would be in right now!’ said Lord Oldfield sternly.

‘Yes sir,’ Charles muttered while clenching his jaw.

‘Go son. Your brother is in his studies, go fetch him. I need to talk to him,’ stated Lord Oldfield.

‘Yes sir,’ Charles replied while walking towards the door.

Two weeks went by and the air became much drier than before. As Ana was getting dressed, all she could think of was Mr. Oldfield and his eyes. ‘Are you awake my dear?’ asked her Mamma while opening Ana’s door.

‘Mamma, oh how I have wonderful news!’ She screeched while tying a faded pink ribbon in her hair.

‘What is it, my love?’ Mamma asked while sitting down on her bed.

‘I think I found the one…’ Ana said while gazing out of the window.

‘Found what Ana?’ replied Mamma with a confused look.

‘I found him Mamma. Him,’ she said with a glint in her eyes.

‘Oh… him…’ stuttered Mamma as she looked at the door.

‘Yes him! Oh please come with me Mamma! Please? He said I could bring a chaperone and-‘

‘Ana! Did you meet this young lad without a chaperone? How many times do I have to tell you, it is not proper for a young woman to meet a man! Especially outside of her class,’ she added the last part with a whisper.

‘Forget class! He was really barbarous, I tell you, kind, and funny! He also has the bluest eyes I have ever seen. Oh Mamma, those eyes are real! Those eyes are in my book,’ she said while grabbing her worn out book on her desk. She gazed at her book and wondered what he meant when he said that pink faired her skin.

‘I am not feeling too well to go with you today, Ana,’ said her mamma while straightening her apron and walking towards the door. ‘Don’t get in too much trouble Ana. Eyes are everywhere.’

‘Yes Mamma,’ she said while deflating on her bed. ‘I am a young woman. I am proper,’ she said while feeling empty from those words.

‘Good girl. Run along now,’ replied Mamma while closing the door behind her. Ana gathered up her book and pencil and walked out the door by herself.

‘See you at dinner time Mamma!’ Anna yelled while closing the front door.

‘Miss Lewis. It is nice to see you again on this beautiful day,’ Charles said while walking up to Ana. Giggling, she slowed down and smirked, ‘Yes Mr. Oldfield, it is quite lovely.’

‘Care to take a stroll with me?’ asked Charles as he held out his arm.

‘I would love to…but it is not proper to hold your arm in public, and I do not have a chaperone with me,’ said Ana with a hurtful look in her eyes. Charles glanced around and saw a few people staring at them.

‘Then I guess it is too bad,’ he said while grabbing her arm and running to the willow tree that they sat at two weeks ago. All she could do was giggle and run.

‘Charles! My arm will fall off if you keep pulling it,’ Ana said while gasping for air.
'My apologies, my lady,' Charles said while lying down on the ground and looking up at the tree. ‘It has been very suffocating these last few days,’ he whispered while closing his eyes. She watched him from a distance, wanting so badly to stroke his brown hair and look up at the tree herself.

‘Ah!’ she screamed as he pulled her down next to him. ‘Lie with me,’ he said while lying back down. She could not help but blush even more.

‘This is not proper, you know,’ she whispered to him, while gazing around her and up at the tree.

‘And you are not a lady, so it really does not matter,’ he teased back at her.

‘I am too! I am a young woman of age,’ she stated proudly. ‘Congratulations,’ he muttered while dozing off. A few minutes went by when Ana heard a soft snore.

‘Are you sleeping!’ she gasped while sitting up right. Charles turned over on his side so that his back was facing towards her. ‘This barbarous man,’ Ana whispered with a smile. She sat up even more to look at his back side. Firm yet not firm, clothes that looked like silk, and an aura that with authority that surrounded him. ‘Goodnight Charles,’ she whispered as she got up to leave.

A few hours went by and Charles awoke from a slight shiver from the wind. ‘Ana?’ he whispered while turning over. She was not there, but a torn page from her book was there stating her address and her disappointment of his company. ‘Foolish girl,’ he smiled while clutching the torn paper.

A month passed and Ana did not hear from Charles, until one day she heard, ‘Ana, my dear. You received a letter from someone,’ yelled up Ana’s mamma.

‘A letter!’ stated Ana while running down the stairs.

‘You are a young woman, not a child anymore,’ stated her mamma while holding the letter away from Ana’s hands.

‘I am sorry, mamma, I won’t do it again,’ promised Ana.

‘Here, run along.’ said mamma as she walked away. The letter read:

23 May, 66 London

Miss Lewis,

My apologies for writing so late. I have been busy with family affairs, and the weather has been very gloomy for a walk in the park. With permission, I would like to meet you again. Meet me at the town square on the twenty-fifth of May after tea time. I will be waiting for you.

Yours truly.

Mr. Charles Oldfield

‘Who was that from?’ whispered her mother.

‘Mamma!’ Ana gasped in horror as she clutched the letter to her chest, ‘No one. I have to go,’ replied Ana as she ran up the stairs.

Two days went by and Ana was preparing herself for this day. ‘The town square has lots of eyes,’ she thought, and she was determined to avoid making a scene. ‘I’m off to the square,’ called Ana as she walked out of the door. ‘Today is the day,’ she said as she walked down the street. As she passed Mrs. Betty’s house and rounded the corner to pass the four walls, she found herself standing in the middle of the town square looking for Charles.
'Miss Lewis!' Ana turned to watch Charles push through the crowd of people.

'You made it, Mr. Oldfield,' Ana giggled.

'Yes, yes I did. How are you on this lovely day?' Charles asked with a gleam in his eyes.

'I am alright,' replied Ana while watching everyone stare at them. 'Would you like to go somewhere quieter?'

'Perfect. What do you have in mind?' asked Charles.

'Follow me,' she said as she turned to head towards the outskirts of the town, next to an old barn with an open field of buttercups.

'So beautiful,' Charles said, awestruck.

'I know. This is one of my many hideouts from everyone… and everything,' she whispered as she sat down in the middle of the field while playing with a flower.

'I am on a mission!' Charles said while sitting beside her.

'What mission is that?'

'A request for permission to court a certain lady,' replied Charles.

'Oh…' said Ana with a deflating heart.

'What do you think?' asked Charles.

'I think the young lady would be happy that you are courting her,' replied Ana.

'Perfect,' whispered Charles as he leaned in to kiss her. As they slowly wrapped each other in a long embrace, time seemed to have slowed down for Ana and she finally saw a way to fly.

The Journey of Early Livelihood

Two more months went by, and Ana became furiously sick. Letters ceased from both Ana and Charles, until one day Charles opened a letter not from Ana, but from her mother.

19 Jul, 66 London

Mr. Oldfield,

It is my deepest regards to inform you that Ana has taken a bug of some sort. A family doctor of ours will be visiting on the twenty-first of July. I request your presence on this day, for if I am correct, this bug is not curable.

Signed,

Mrs. Lewis

'Not curable?' Charles thought out loud.

'What is not curable my son?' asked Lord Oldfield while standing in front of the window in his studies.

'Nothing sir. Some friends of mine are sick and are requesting my presence. I will be gone for a few days is all,' replied Charles.

'Don’t stay too long, because we need to discuss your marriage with the Robinsons,’ replied Lord Oldfield as he sat down and looked Charles in the eyes. ‘We need this alliance son, don’t disappoint me.’

'Yes sir,’ said Charles-

'She is with child,’ hushed the doctor with worried glances between both parents.

'Wha… What did you say?’ asked Ana’s mother

'She is carrying a child, and what she is experiencing is morning sickness,’ replied the doctor as he wiped the sweat from his forehead. ‘She will need to drink plenty of water and pray that this child lives.’

‘I knew it…’ replied her mother.

'How much do we owe you, doctor?’ asked Ana’s father.

'Nothing… I advise you keep her inside for now,’ said the doctor as he packed up his things to leave.

'Yes doctor, thank you again,’ spoke her mother from across the room.

A knock came at the door as the doctor was heading towards the door.

‘I will get that… good day,’ the doctor said while opening the door.

'Hello sir,’ said the doctor as he stepped around Charles.

‘Hello,’ replied Charles.

'Oh… you must be Mr. Oldfield,’ said Ana’s mother with an absent look in her eyes.
‘Nice to meet you, how is Ana?’ replied Charles with concern in his voice.

‘Ana… is sick,’ said Ana’s mother.

‘Yes, she is sick, sick with child… did you know anything about this?’ replied Ana’s father with a cold tone to his voice.

‘Wi… With child,’ Charles said with a look of disbelief.

‘Yes, with child,’ replied Ana’s father with a more menace look in his eyes. ‘How will you fix this lad?’

‘I will fix this,’ muttered Charles with a shocked look on his face. ‘I will fix this.’

‘We know you will, son. We know you will,’ said her mother.

The marriage took place within a fortnight, and both families were present, but no other family members attended. Lord Oldfield did not want a big wedding for his son, so he requested a small one in the backyard of his estates. There was no catering present, no decorations for the bride, just a priest and a few chairs. After the wedding was finished, both parties went inside to eat a light dinner before departing their separate ways.

‘Lord Oldfield, you have a beautiful home,’ said Ana after she finished her small bowl of soup.

‘Thank you,’ replied Lord Oldfield with a stiff tone. ‘I worked very hard, as you can tell.’ ‘I see,’ said Ana quietly.

‘Actually, I am needing to speak with my son for a few moments, do you mind?’ asked Lord Oldfield to everyone that sat at the dinner table.

‘No, of course not-,’ ‘Absolutely not-,’ chorused everyone.

‘See me in my study in a few moments,’ replied Lord Oldfield as he stood up to leave the dining room.

‘Yes sir-’

‘Shut the door, lad,’ said Lord Oldfield from his chair. ‘Have a seat.’

Charles sat as he waited for his father to speak to him.

‘Do you understand what you have done?’ said Lord Oldfield icily.

‘Yes sir, I do.’

‘No lad, you do not! If you did, you would not have married that trollop-’

‘She is not a trollop, father,’ said Charles. ‘She is the mother of my child. The woman that understands me. That woman sees me, father! Not just a bag of money, but me.’

‘Does she? I see a woman with a child, that broke our alliance with the Robinsons. They were going to help us excel your career Charles, did you not think for once-’

‘I did think! Just not how you wanted me to,’ spoke Charles with a look of hurt in his eyes.

‘You did not think, son, and I am sorry for that. Your mother erased you from the family tree as I ordered her to do so. I cannot have this woman and you together in my house. I will give you some money, but you are to never show your face here again,’ stated Lord Oldfield.

‘As you wish,’ replied Charles with tears in his eyes as he accepted the money.

28 Nov, 81 London

Dear Mr. Oldfield,
It is with regards to say that your process to the colony was successful. The Board of Directors has decided to send you to Rugby Tennessee, and upon your request you will be given free boarding on the next ship to United States. As mentioned before, your responsibilities are to write back your experience in Rugby and give full detail of the colonization. Your wife and children will be well taken care of by Mr. Kimber himself. We ask that you prepare your leave in a few months.

Best wishes,

Rugby Board of Directors

‘Ana, this is a wonderful opportunity for us,’ said Charles while holding up the letter. ‘Besides, your mother said she would check up on you every now and then. I also requested for Mr. Kimber to look after you. Ana please-’

‘Fine, Charles, go to Rugby,’ replied Ana as she mentally started to build up walls around herself.

‘Ana, you know this is for you and the family. I will be back home soon, and I promise it will be just a few months. You know we have not been doing well financially and the children add on to our cost-’

‘Why can you not take me? You promised you would protect me ever since your father-’

‘And I have,’ said Charles. ‘You will be fine. That I promise.’

‘Alright, if you must go then go. I am not stopping you,’ replied Ana.
The Letters

Rugby, Tenn.

12 Jan, 82

Dearest Ana,

I have made it to Rugby, and it is different from London. The air is much more breathable and the colony is more spacious than I thought. Young men are here to learn about farming, they are from families like mine. The people are nice here and have been accepting of me. I wish you and the children were here. I am currently looking for a place to stay, and I asked Mr. Kimber to give you a monthly allowance. I do not know if he will or not and if needed he can pay you of what they owe me for coming here.

Believe me ever,
Charles Oldfield

‘Ana, my dear, it is from Charles,’ said Mamma as she handed Ana the letter.

‘I cannot, Mamma,’ Ana whispered with tears in her eyes and loathing in her heart. ‘Why am I here and he is there? I do not understand-‘

Rugby, Tenn.

14 Feb, 82

My dearest Ana,

I am still looking for a place to live at. It is quiet at night, and the views are magnificent. How are you my love? I have not heard from you in a month, the children must be curious on where I am at. I hope you told them the news by now and I am even considering of moving you down here. I am sorry that it is taking me so long, but I promise just a few more months.

Your dearest beloved,
Charles Oldfield

‘A few more months,’ whispered Ana as she tore up the letter. ‘So much for coming home soon.’

7 Mar, 82 London

Dearest Charles,

Word has come from Mamma that you have wrote another letter again. I dare not read it, for my emotions are tangled up with the idea of your newly founded freedom. The children are growing so much without you here. I dare ask when will you be coming back home to London? Mama is not doing too well, for she is taking it very hard with the social withdrawal. Papa has taken the liquor bottle again, and the house is about to be up for sale soon if we don’t fix our financial issues. Oh Charles why did you have to leave me with this situation? If only I knew what it meant to marry you-

‘No I can’t send this,’ said Ana while crumpling up the letter. As she looked out the window into the dewy morning, she thought back on the brighter days when Charles and she were not married.

19 Apr, 82 London

Dear Charles,

I apologize for not writing to you sooner for I have become sick with erysipelas. The weather has become quite dreadful and the house was sold for a much lower price than expected. I am currently living next door to Mamma and Papa and the children are well. Henry misses you a lot. We received word from Mrs. Betty that your mother has passed away. Word was mentioned that a beautiful funeral was being prepared for her, but we are not invited to it. I am sorry Charles, this is my fault and we both know it is. That day... I was not thinking, I wanted away from all of this, but it seems that I just dragged us down even more. I miss you Charles, please come back home.

Your loving,
Ana Oldfield

‘Are you really sorry Ana?’ asked her mother.

‘No I am not,’ replied Ana with a distant tone to her voice.
Rugby, Tenn.

6 May, 82

Dear Kimber,

I have received by this mail a copy of your letter to your Brother as to my Boy. I feel I can never thank you as I wish. But one thing certain nothing that I can do to serve your interests shall be left undone. I will also write my thanks to Mr. Wilson for kindly helping me.

I am afraid my poor little wife is ill from erysipelas in a letter received last night Henry said her eyes were nearly closed. Poor little girl she has had her ___ of troubles since I left, but if I can only get them over here and see my way to enough to live upon for a few years I shouldn’t mind. By this time you will have received my letter weekly how ___ I am and be able to judge what is best to do. Each day has also been of service to me in looking the future in the face.

Yours very truly,

Charles Oldfield

‘Henry, go see who is at the door,’ whispered Ana weakly.

‘Young lad where is your mother?’ asked Mr. Kimber at the door.

‘She is in the drawing room, come in,’ replied Henry.

‘Ana… how do you fare?’ asked Kimber while he sat down across from her.

‘I am alright. Why do you ask?’

‘I received word from Charles. He is struggling to find land and mentioned how you were sick from your letter you wrote to him,’ said Mr. Kimber.

‘As you can see, I am not well. I miss my husband terribly,’ whispered Ana.

‘Then let me book you a trip to the colonies. You will feel better once you see your husband again,’ said Mr. Kimber in a confident voice.

‘No let Henry go. I am to unfit to go right now, but Henry can go with no troubles. He needs to experience the world.’ replied Ana tiredly, leaving no room for arguments.

Rugby Tenn

23 May, 82

My Dearest Ana,

I have fallen sick with diarrhea, and I am allowed to stay at the doctor’s house until he comes back. I wish you would come sooner, and bring all the children with you. I miss you terribly and my loneliness has increased by far. Why do you not write to me anymore my love? Please write soon, how are you truly?

Believe in me,

Charles Oldfield

‘My loneliness has increased too, Charles, but you cannot see that because you are across the world,’ said Ana absently. She tossed the letter on the floor where the rest of his letters lay. ‘I am tired,’ she whispered as she crawled into bed when it was barely noon.

Rugby Morgan Co.

Tennessee

U.S.A.

Dear ____.

I have not received any answer to my last letter to you about the Boots and Trousers. I wish you had sent them to Shilton at once as I find my eldest boy is coming out to join me. He will arrive at New York in about a week if all’s well. And I am sure if the rest of my family will come out before the Autumn. I am inclined to try and see what good can be done before they come. The “Board of Aid” in London has given me a farm here and freehold to entice me to remain. And I shall do so if they will give me a salary for the first 5 years while I am getting my farm clear and in order. I wish I had come out to this country ___ years ago, while I had some money to work with but what’s the use of wishing.

Yours Truly.

Charles Oldfield
23 Jun 82 London

My dearest Charles,

I cannot fathom coming to the colonies and living with you. Rugby sounds so disorganized and not well kept for any class structure. I would feel so lost being in Rugby, and it seems to me you are happy there with your new freedom from London’s laws and the eyes-

‘No I will not write to him,’ Ana whispered as she threw away the last piece of paper she owned. ‘If he seeks me, then he can seek me in London.’

Rugby, Tenn.

27 June, 82

Dear Mrs. Oldfield,

It is sad for me to inform you that Mr. Oldfield has passed away on the twenty-fourth of June from a severe attack of rheumatic fever. His son was present for his death, and was present for his funeral. He will be buried at Rugby Tennessee if you would like to go make your condolence. I hope you are feeling well Mrs. Oldfield.

Sincerely sorry,

Mr. Kimber

‘You barbarous man,’ whispered Ana as she read the short letter that Mr. Kimber sent her. ‘I should have gone to him, I should have been there,’ she yelled.

As night became morning, morning became night, Ana lost track of time. Time ultimately stopped for her when she opened that door and received that unforgettable letter. As few days went by, Ana found herself at the entrance of the family doctor’s shop.

‘Mrs. Oldfield! What can I do for you today?’ asked the family doctor.

‘I am need of some Strychnine and paper, do you have any in stock?’ replied Ana.

‘Uh…’ stuttered the doctor. ‘I do have some left actually. It’s the season again for pests, and the strychnine has been in high demand lately.’

‘Oh, that’s good,’ muttered Ana as she took the strychnine and paper back home. When the evening turned into night, Ana sat at her desk rewriting her letter to her family until finally she wrote the perfect one.

1 Aug, 82 London

My family,

I am sorry for the disappointment that I have brought upon you. It saddens me to the core, knowing that Charles left a burden on me when he left this earth. Not having him here for a proper burial breaks my heart. I am sorry Mamma for not listening to you about Charles. I was young and I fell in love. Love is blinding for the eyes, even when they can see disaster right in front of them. Charles was a loving man and he cared for me. Even when Papa took to the liquor, he wanted to save me from my own pain. Not knowing that he himself would bring much more pain than Papa’s addiction to liquor. I cannot stand in front of my poor children any longer. I cannot stand the sight of their cries of hunger, when I alone can barely feed myself. Don’t be mad at me Mamma, be mad at Charles. For when he died, he dragged the last piece of my soul down with him. I love you, my family. Mamma look after my children and tell them every day how much I loved them.

Your dearest daughter,

Ana Oldfield

That night as Ana Oldfield lay in bed, she thought back on her life. She thought back on her memories of the buttercup field, and Charles’s blue eyes.

‘Oh how I miss you, my barbarous man,’ Ana whispered as she closed her eyes and went into a deep sleep.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Teresa Bowman and other volunteers and employees of Historic Rugby, TN, and especially to acknowledge the help of George Zepp, archivist at the Historic Rugby Archives and Research Center.
References


