Ralls and Bennett script

Laura

Hello, folks. I’m Mrs. Laura Ralls, and this is my sister, Mrs. Cora Bennett. We’re both tailoresses—or seamstresses if you prefer. We’re here paying our respects to our friend, Robert Case. We hadn’t known him very long before the tragic event of August 27, 1915, but he seemed like a nice young fellow.

Cora

Yes, it was all so sad. We hadn’t been in the area all that long ourselves. I came from Los Angeles in 1914 with Mama, Mrs. Laura Cadwallader. Our friend, Mr. William Thompson, came with us, and helped us set up a tent house in Tin Mine Canyon on an abandoned claim. We made lots of friends real fast, but *some* people didn’t like us too much.

Laura

Yes, *some* people don’t like anyone else having a good time. The people in this area had voted themselves dry, and got upset just because we served a few drinks to our visitors. Now isn’t that silly, with Riverside County having so many employed in the grape-growing and wine industry. They threw Mama, Cora, and Mr. Thompson in jail, and sent Cora’s daughter Ethel to a detention home.

Cora

They claimed we were running a “blind pig” drinking establishment, violating the liquor laws, just because we like to party a little with our friends. We got out, though, and sister Laura came to stay with me while the kids were home with Mama in Los Angeles. Things went pretty smoothly for a while, until that incident with Robert.

Laura

Poor Robert. Would you folks like to know more about him? Cora, he was your special friend, so maybe you’d better start.

Cora

Well, to begin with, I knew he was married. <sigh> The good ones always are, or else they die young like my two dear husbands, and Papa, and our step-father, too.

Laura

And my husband. We haven’t had very good luck with men. <sigh> That’s why we’ve had to fend for ourselves most of the time, and there aren’t too many job opportunities for ladies. Oh, sorry to interrupt. Go on.

Cora

Robert was about my age, just 33 in 1915 by the official records, but he let slip once that he was really three years younger. He left a wife and children on his farm in Grand Traverse County, Michigan, near where his folks and all his family lived. I’m not sure how he came to be in California, but I guess it had to do with whatever went wrong with his marriage.

Laura

He lived in Redlands first, didn’t he? Had something to do with automobiles in Redlands and Yucaipa, and was in the National Guard in Redlands.

Cora

That’s right, Company G, 7th Infantry. I remember because Captain Johnson and Lieutenant Carrithers came from Redlands to investigate. He’d served in the regular army, too, and spent time in the Philippines, they said.

Laura

Didn’t he manage a livery stable in Corona for a month or two? Before he came to work for us, I mean, and you set him to blasting out a tunnel. Didn’t they ask about the tunnel at the inquest? I don’t remember you explaining about it.

Cora

Well, it was a mining claim wasn’t it? Maybe I wanted to reopen the mine. Besides, it could have made a handy storage area for our supplies, don’t you think?

Laura

They said he used the fuse and blasting caps to do himself in. The coroner thought he’d hooked up some caps to a length of fuse, lay down on it, and lit it. <shudder> I know, the officers from Redlands didn’t believe it. They thought it was a murder case, but he did leave you a note with those checks.

Cora

Yes, I remember. “You will find my remains on the trail to Oak Flat. Do as you like; you know the cause.” They wanted me to explain that—as if anyone could even know what someone else was thinking in such circumstances. And if he wanted to leave his money to a friend, I guess that was no one else’s business. He left me his watch and glasses too. Just something to remember him by.

Laura

I guess there wouldn’t even have been an inquest if those fellows from the National Guard hadn’t come around asking questions. As it was, the jury couldn’t decide whether it was suicide or foul play, and just said the cause of death was a fractured skull. And then, instead of concentrating on poor Robert, those busybodies had to start talking about *us*, and claiming we were running a “disorderly house.”

Cora

Poor Robert barely cold in his grave, and Constable Larrabee came out with a summons, charging us with vagrancy, of all things. Sure, we didn’t exactly own the land we were on, but that area was so tied up in land disputes I don’t think anyone was sure who owned it. And nobody else was using it at the time.

Laura

We finally decided that the people of Corona were just a little too unfriendly—some of them, anyway—and went home to Mama.