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RUTH HERRICK
"A fiery, long-limbed girl"

THE other day, when re-reading Middleton Murry's and Ruth Mantz's *Life of Katherine Mansfield*, I came upon the passage quoted above. But it is neither as a pianist nor as the friend of Katherine Mansfield that the name "Ruth Herrick" is at present familiar to most New Zealanders. Could the two Ruth Herricks be the same?

I went to see Miss Herrick at W.R.N.S. headquarters. Miss Herrick's "fair mane" is now white, and she wears it in a becoming crop too short to be flung back with quick impatience. Long limbs, however, do not presumably alter with the years, and fieriness is a quality that may well be of service to the Commandant of the Wrens. The quality, however, was completely absent from our interview.

Miss Herrick admitted that she had known Katherine Mansfield very well during the four years they were at Queen's College together.

"Wasted Years"

Queen's College, London, was a very pleasant place to spend one's schooldays.

THEY WERE AT SCHOOL TOGETHER

"THE girls' special precinct at college was the Bun Shop. Here Kathleen might meet her best friend of the moment, or go with one of the boarders—Ruth Herrick, another New Zealander, a fiery, long-limbed girl, with a mane of fair hair flung back with quick impatience as she charged about. Ruth Herrick was a pianist too, and they often practised together, and went to recitals at Queen's Hall."



KATHERINE MANSFIELD
"A rather square little thing"

It was one of the first establishments to cater for the demand for an adequate education for women, and though the out-of-class hours were decorous and rigidly supervised the actual time spent in class provided more liberty for the pupil than was usual in most schools of the period.

"Queen's was one of the few women's colleges to adopt the lecture system," explained Miss Herrick. "The responsibility for attending the lectures rested on ourselves—we could wander in and out of them, cut them, or go to them unprepared. Twice a year we had to write papers on our subjects. But we never got into the habit of studying. I know that later on Kathleen refers in her journal to her 'wasted years' at school, and complains that she went to lectures to look at the professors and the other girls rather than to listen to what was being talked about."

"How did Kathleen get on with the professors?"

"Most of them, I'm afraid, thought her troublesome. She was certainly very lazy. The only one who had much time for her was the Professor of German, who labelled her 'outstanding.' The Professor of English certainly had no very high opinion of her talent, even in English Composition. I've been rather wishing I could see him again, and hear whether he's changed his opinion or not."

First Impression

"But during the time I knew her, Kathleen, in spite of editing the *School Magazine*, was far more interested in her music than in her writing. The whole of her spare time was spent with her 'cello.'"

"Do you remember your first impression of her?"

"Yes. She came to the school with her two elder sisters, Vera and Lottie, and they all wore black velour hats and sailor coats with brass buttons. I don't know if my impression is very clear, because at first I didn't know which was Kathleen and which Charlotte. Kathleen was fourteen at the time, a rather square little thing, what I'd call the 'pony' build. And she had very wavy dark hair, almost frizzy."

"Yet both her best known later photographs—especially the one with the fringe—seem to show her with very straight, smooth hair?"

"Yes, I've often wondered about that, especially since the discovery of permanent waving, because they say that negro girls from Harlem get their hair 'permed' to take the wave out. However that's scarcely a possible explanation. The straightness was probably the result of her later ill-health."

Very Good Company

"Was she popular at school?"

"Not over-popular. She was a strange girl, and she had an intensity beyond the understanding of most of her schoolfellows. But her few friendships—with Ida Baker for instance—were very real. She had a knack of withdrawing herself completely from those around her which made the ordinary schoolgirl inclined to think her aloof. However, those who got to know her well grew to accept Kath's moods as an essential part of her."

"One thing, however, that endeared her to her schoolfellows was her immense entertainment value. She was very good company and guaranteed to lead you into trouble. She used her very vivid imagination to think up new ways of being naughty. Mimicry was her strong suit and her sense of drama was faultless—she could think herself into any part. One of her most successful impersonations was dressing up as a prospective parent and interviewing the Principal on behalf of her supposed daughter."

"Did she get away with it?"

"Yes, the Principal hadn't the faintest idea that she'd been hoaxed. On other occasions of course we were less successful. The consequences however were never very serious, as at Queen's discipline was enforced by frequent appeals to one's better feelings!"

"Did you see much of Kathleen after she left school?"

(Continued on next page)



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