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Leah
...the substitute bride
based on Genesis 29:15-31
by Ralph Milton
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Leah's soliloquy

I will never forget Jacob's eyes.

It had been a joyous night for me. Murmurs, gentle touch, contented sleep. His arm resting quietly under my head, his breath soft on my veiled cheek.

Just as the morning light brought its glow into our tent, Jacob woke, and looked at me. I saw tenderness and love in his dark eyes.

Then he lifted my veil and the look of love turned to disgust and anger.

"What the blazes?" Jacob yelled. "What are you doing here?"

I knew it would be like this. I told father and my brother Laban that it wouldn't work. Jacob would despise me. They wouldn't listen.

"It's your only chance," Laban said. "You're no spring chicken Leah, and you have those gawd-awful eyes, and if we don't get you married to Jacob you'll be an old maid. An old maid, Leah, who nobody wants and nobody cares about."

"No," I said. "It's not right."

"Leah," said Laban. "Your father and I have decided. You will wear a heavy veil, and we'll keep your sister Rachel hidden away, and we'll marry you off to Jacob. After a few glasses of wine, he won't know the difference. You have no say in the matter. Now shut up and do as you are told."

I did as I was told.

A woman, especially an ugly woman, has no rights. But I couldn't help feeling like a piece of slightly tainted meat my brother and father were trying to sell some unsuspecting buyer.

But somehow, as father and Laban worked on the plan to trick Jacob, I began to fantasize that maybe Jacob might love me after all. Maybe, the wedding night would be a night of love, and he might at least not despise me.

It was silly of course. But I don't have much to live on, except my fantasies.

Jacob stormed out of the tent that morning, as I guess I knew he would. And I could hear snippets of angry arguments from father's tent most of the next day. In the end, my father and Laban agreed that Jacob could marry Rachel too, but he'd have to work another seven years to pay for her, just as he had already worked seven years to pay for me, the ugly bride he didn't want.

I tried to be a good wife. When Jacob came into my tent to do his husband's duty, I tried so hard to be kind, to be gentle, to be loving. But I knew he never came to me in love.

I would have died, I think, except for God. I talked to God a lot. I cried a lot at night and in the tears I found some comfort. I complained about my eyes, grumbled about my lot in life and prayed that I would have the babies Jacob wanted. And they came, my little blessings. Beautiful boys.

And so I teased Rachel. I taunted her. "Look at the beautiful boys I've given Jacob! Where are your babies? Ahh...it must be tough being so barren."

I thought having those babies would make Jacob love me, but it didn't work. Maybe that's why I made those snooty remarks to my pretty younger sister. It was the only time in our whole lives when I had something and she didn't.

It took some years, some tears, and much prayer, before finally I told Rachel I was sorry. I'm glad we're friends again. I was with her when she finally had a baby – little Joseph. But she was older now and older women have a hard time having babies. And when Benjamin was born – well Rachel gave her life to have that baby. It broke my heart to lose my sister, and it broke Jacob's heart to lose the woman he had loved so deeply and so long.

One night Jacob came to me to do his husband's duty. But instead we talked and talked and cried and laughed a little as we shared our grief. And for a little while at least, I knew that in a different kind of way, he loved me too.

And so I am content. I have my children. And Jacob has become, if not a husband, then at least a friend. And I talk to God a lot.

I am content.

**Ralph Milton has written a number of books,
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