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## Stories

Elizabeth Stuart Phelps

Roxanne Harde , editor

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# Stories

ELIZABETH STUART PHELPS

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY ROXANNE HARDE



Today, **Elizabeth Stuart Phelps** (1844–1911) is best known for a handful of her novels: *The Gates Ajar* (1868), *The Silent Partner* (1871), and *The Story of Avis* (1877). During her life, however, the short story was a hugely popular genre in which she was fully invested and where she made a good deal of her living. Stories were her earliest and latest publications, and they were work that she both enjoyed and employed to greater ends. From 1864 to her death in 1911, she published almost one hundred and fifty short stories in the leading periodicals of the day. This collection makes available some of those stories, an important and engaging part of her oeuvre that previously has been all but ignored. Phelps saw her narratives as vehicles through which she could reform her society, and her artistic and political vision is both original and transformative.

## **Contents:**

### **Introduction**

- 1. “A story is a story, however large”:** **Writing for Children** — How June Found Massa Linkum • Bobbit’s Hotel • One Way to Get an Education • The Girl Who Could Not Write a Composition • Mary Elizabeth
- 2. “A fact which I think Mr. Tennyson has omitted”:** **Writing under the Influence** — The Lady of Shalott • The Christmas of Sir Galahad • The True Story of Guenever
- 3. “I went, I saw, I conquered”:** **Rewriting the Church** — A Woman’s Pulpit • Saint Caligula • The Reverend Malachi Matthew
- 4. “The young woman’s account”:** **Writing Women’s Sexuality** — Magdalene • At Bay • Doherty
- 5. “Thousands of pale women know”:** **Writing Women and the Civil War** — A Sacrifice Consumed • My Refugees • Margaret Bronson
- 6. “Replace the old brutal heroisms”:** **Writing Women’s Adventures** — Mavourneen • Wrecked in Port • The Chief Operator
- 7. “Suspecting a Spiritualistic medium”:** **Writing Spiritualism** — What Was the Matter? • The Day of My Death 215 • Since I Died • Told in Trust
- 8. “A new type of employer”:** **Writing Social Reform** — Blythe • My Story • Not a Pleasant Story • Tammyshanty

### **Bibliography**

Cover: Elizabeth Nourse, *Meditation (Under the Trees)*, 1902. Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery & Sculpture Garden. University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Zea Books  
Lincoln, Nebraska

ISBN 978-1-60962-281-7  
DOI: 10.32873/unl.dc.zea.1341

*STORIES*

ELIZABETH STUART PHELPS

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY  
ROXANNE HARDE

ZEA BOOKS  
LINCOLN, NEBRASKA  
2022

Introductions and volume arrangement  
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ISBN 978-1-60962-280-0 paperback  
ISBN 978-1-60962-281-7 e-book  
DOI: 10.32873/unl.dc.zea.1341

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## CONTENTS

Introduction	5
1. “A story is a story, however large”: Writing for Children	
How June Found Massa Linkum	12
Bobbitt’s Hotel	19
One Way to Get an Education	24
The Girl Who Could Not Write a Composition	29
Mary Elizabeth	36
2. “A fact which I think Mr. Tennyson has omitted”: Writing under the Influence	
The Lady of Shalott	45
The Christmas of Sir Galahad	54
The True Story of Guenever	60
3. “I went, I saw, I conquered”: Rewriting the Church	
A Woman’s Pulpit	71
Saint Caligula	86
The Reverend Malachi Matthew	94
4. “The young woman’s account”: Writing Women’s Sexuality	
Magdalene	107
At Bay	118
Doherty	131
5. “Thousands of pale women know”: Writing Women and the Civil War	
A Sacrifice Consumed	139
My Refugees	147
Margaret Bronson	163
6. “Replace the old brutal heroisms”: Writing Women’s Adventures	
Mavourneen	176
Wrecked in Port	181

The Chief Operator	189
7. “Suspecting a Spiritualistic medium”: Writing Spiritualism	
What Was the Matter?	202
The Day of My Death	215
Since I Died	234
Told in Trust	238
8. “A new type of employer”: Writing Social Reform	
Blythe	252
My Story	257
Not a Pleasant Story	262
Tammyshanty	273
Bibliography	287

## INTRODUCTION

There is one form of fiction which, I think, is imperfectly understood by students and critics, to which, as it happens, I have given some special attention, and is therefore peculiarly interesting to me. I mean the short story.

Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *Chapters from a Life*, 266.

“A story is a story, however large,” Elizabeth Stuart Phelps writes at the beginning of the second installment of her serialized short story, “The Girl Who Could Not Write a Composition” (1871). Before finishing this tale about a successful young businesswoman who had been labelled a dunce at school, Phelps’s narrator continues, “And this is the rest of it; and no more wonderful, after all, than truth is apt to be.” With the first sentence, Phelps seems to be contradicting herself, suggesting that a story is only a story, something entertaining but ultimately unimportant. However, that story can also be large enough to be very important. When she segues into “the rest of it,” she further suggests that a mere narrative, something as trivial as a short story published in a children’s periodical, can hold a world of meaning. A well-told story, engaging though it might be, Phelps suggests, might also offer useful truths along with its entertainment value.

Today, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps is best known for a handful of her novels: *The Gates Ajar* (1868), *The Silent Partner* (1871), and *The Story of Avis* (1877), all in contemporary editions. During her life, however, the short story was hugely popular and a genre in which she was fully invested. Henry Vedder, Phelps’s earliest biographer, praised her abilities for both humorous and serious narrative, and suggested that while *The Gates Ajar* was outgrown by an audience that no longer needed it, her stories would never be, for “she peoples her books with persons whom it is good to know. Her knowledge of human nature is respectably wide and deep. . . . [she] knows her New England well; she knows the dialect, the customs, the ways of the thinking, the spiritual needs of the Yankee, especially the Yankee girl and woman” (193). Phelps made a good deal of her living writing short stories; they were her earliest and latest publications. Moreover, they were work that she both enjoyed and employed to greater ends. Even as she clearly reveled in telling a good story, she saw her narratives as vehicles through which she could reform her society. In short, they might be just stories, but they told truths that could guide her readers to better their world.

This collection makes available some of those stories, an important and engaging part of her oeuvre that previously has been all but ignored. These narratives represent the range of Phelps’s work. From 1864 to her death in 1911, she published almost one hundred and fifty short stories in the leading periodicals of the day, venues such as *The Independent*, a Christian and political weekly; *Our Young Folks* and *St. Nicholas*, popular children’s magazines; *The Atlantic Monthly*, a prestigious literary journal; and popular venues such as *Harper’s* and *Woman’s Home Companion*. Her voice in these pieces is somewhat conventional, but her artistic and political vision is original and transformative. Her work is remarkable for its versatility as she engages with the leading questions and narrative forms of her day in stories that range from romanticism and the gothic to realism and regionalism. She tells adventure stories alongside romances that work to undermine Tennyson’s Arthurian tales. She offers stories of the darkest sides of the



## Introduction

human condition alongside ghost stories told for a laugh or a thrill. She writes for children with confidence in their wisdom and humanity. She returns throughout her career to consider the spirits that haunted her grandfather's house, and she writes local color stories that bring alive the Massachusetts coast. She examines the construction of gender identity, masculinities as well as femininities. She engages with the question of what makes a hero, and she keeps the Civil War in the cultural purview. Readers in this new millennium will be enlightened by Phelps's stories about an increasingly distant culture. As readers today are confronted with Phelps's fictional examinations of bias and the status quo alongside her critical depiction of her culture, they may reconsider the pervasiveness of social influence and how prejudices are perpetuated. They most certainly will be entertained.

### LIFE AND CAREER

Elizabeth Stuart Phelps presents a paradox to today's readers. She often conforms to the conventions of American society in the postbellum period even as she offers startlingly original critiques of that society. She is both in her time and ahead of it. Her narrative voice is that of the traditional, sentimental "lady author," but that voice describes progressive reforms. Throughout her long career, she offered a radical vision that engaged with and conjoined two of the questions that most deeply concerned America after the Civil War: the question of religion in an increasingly secular society, and what was popularly known as "the woman question." Early in 1871, she wrote in her essay "The Higher Claim," published in the *Independent*, "it is no figure of speech to say that the 'woman question' is the most tremendous question God has ever asked the world since he asked, 'What think ye of Christ? On Calvary?'" (1). She wrote about her investment in "the Woman Cause" to poet John Greenleaf Whittier, and she exhorted George Eliot, another correspondent, to become more concerned with religion and with women's issues. Unhappy with and constricted by her Congregational upbringing, Phelps rewrote her church, revising the ministry in essays and fiction. Although she never used the term "feminist"—the term was not in common currency in her life—Phelps nevertheless was an important part of first-wave feminism in the United States, as she argued for increased education and career opportunities for women in essays, and revised their lives in novels and short stories to suit her own liberated vision. In joining the suffrage, temperance, and anti-vivisection movements and writing those agendas in several genres, she combined her feminist and Christian ideals in reform and literary work.

However, for all of her radical and redemptive visions, Phelps was a woman who followed social conventions. She believed a woman artist could not combine marriage and career, an idea that informs one of her finest novels, *The Story of Avis*, but she entered what would be an unsatisfying marriage in 1888 even as she continued to support her household. While deeply committed to equality among all people, the bigotries of her culture creep into her writing. Her various biases, such as her prejudice against immigrants, reflect and perpetuate those of her own upper-middle/professional class. By redeeming the fallen woman in fiction and poetry, she followed the example of Jesus, but she tended to kill off more of her redeemed magdalenes than she left alive. She advocated for dress reform but could not commit to the bifurcated dress worn by the leading suffragists; she considered the bloomer fit only for sporting activities. She waged war on the pervasive social domestic ideal of the "Angel in the House," but she continued to rely on the affective and sentimental tropes associated with that lady. Her continued reliance on the

## Introduction

sentimental explains in part why Phelps had a progressively declining readership in the final years of her long career, and why her work has been only sporadically and selectively taken up by scholars in the last several decades. However, enough readers have been able to engage with her creativity and vision to see six of her major novels back into print, where they have stayed. These novels, three of them featuring female protagonists in the nontraditional roles of doctor, artist, and social reformer, and three of them concerning Phelps's original view of the afterlife, are socially relevant and engaging, but somewhat less intense and compelling than her short fiction.

Phelps considered her novels and biographies her more important work, but she also valued her short fiction as meaningful literature. Throughout her memoirs and beginning with its title, *Chapters from a Life* (1896), Elizabeth Stuart Phelps emphasizes the literariness of her life. She was born in Boston on 31 August 1844 to two authors: Elizabeth (Wooster) Stuart Phelps wrote the best-selling Sunnyside series and other domestic novels; Reverend Austin Phelps taught at Andover Theological Seminary and published many theological texts. Phelps sums up their influence by commenting that it was "impossible to be *their* daughter and not to have something to say, and a pen to say it" (15). Phelps was baptized Mary Gray, after a close friend of her mother's, but sometime between her mother's death when she was eight and the publication of her first story when she was thirteen, Phelps took her mother's name and soon followed in her footsteps. Phelps notes that her mother's publishers likely wished that their author was not a professor's wife and a mother, but instead free to "send copy as fast as it is wanted," and she centered her own life on her career, working to send copy as fast as it was wanted (15).

Phelps began to send that copy when still a teenager. Her first story went to the *Youth's Companion*, a leading children's periodical to which she contributed with some regularity throughout her life. She suggests that the event marked her coming of age as a young woman more than the advent of a literary career. That event came with her first published story for adults. The story, "A Sacrifice Consumed," appeared in the January 1864 issue of *Harper's Magazine*. Phelps discusses it both in its social context, the Civil War, and as the beginning of her literary career. Noting that after it was accepted, she "wrote with a distinct purpose and . . . quite steadily," Phelps describes writing her stories, the editors that accepted them, and the periodicals that published them (*Chapters* 19). She built and maintained good working relationships with the important literary figures and organizations of the day, and her stories regularly appeared in the leading periodicals.

Phelps's steady writing produced a large body of work, almost sixty books by the time of her death at age sixty-six. Although she suffered from chronic health conditions and was often an invalid, she worked on stories steadily throughout her career. She also published novels, essays, poems, and a several nonfiction books, including biographies of her father and Jesus Christ. Moreover, she always wrote for both children and adults. After her mother died, her father remarried, first her mother's sister, Mary Stuart, in 1854, and then after her death from tuberculosis, Mary Ann Johnson, in 1858. The latter marriage produced two sons on whom Phelps based the hero of her Trotty books. She also wrote the Ellen, Tiny, and Gypsy Breynton series at almost the same time she worked on her first novel for adults, *The Gates Ajar* (1868). Outsold in the nineteenth century only by Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the novel was translated into several languages, and it gave Phelps financial independence. Vedder notes

## Introduction

that *The Gates Ajar* had twenty printings sell out its first year and “the book was on every table, and its discussion was on every lip” (187). Phelps used its profits to build a home in Gloucester, MS. She followed it with two sequels, *Beyond the Gates* (1883) and *The Gates Between* (1887).

During the peak years of her career, Phelps worked tirelessly as an author and an advocate for social change. Her various causes—suffrage, temperance, dress reform, labor reform, education and economic independence for women, and against vivisection—found their way into her writing for children and adults. While she preferred the retiring life of a writer, when called upon she did not shy away from public life. In 1876, Phelps was the first woman to lecture at Boston University, on George Eliot for a series titled “Representative Modern Fiction,” and in the early years of the twentieth century, she gave two anti-vivisection addresses to the Massachusetts State Legislature. Other aspects of her life—her grandfather’s encounters with a poltergeist and the spiritualist movement more generally, her continued poor health and invalidism—were also subjects of her writing.

Throughout her life, Phelps’s friends and correspondents were leading literary figures, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, George Eliot, John Greenleaf Whittier, and Annie Fields. She maintained a lively and affectionate, and sometimes combative, relationship with her publishers and editors, particularly Henry Houghton. She contributed to literary causes and projects, including the first collaborative novel, *The Whole Family* (1908). In 1888, Phelps married a literary man, Herbert Dickinson Ward, a journalist seventeen years her junior. Together they co-authored two Biblical romances in 1890 and 1891. Their marriage was not particularly happy as Phelps suffered from increasing ill-health; her productivity and sales decreased, and their income became less than adequate. Phelps died 28 January 1911 in Newton Center, MS. Her last work, *Comrades* (1911), was published posthumously.

### THE STORIES: SHIFTING REALITIES

Phelps continued to write short stories and novels into the twentieth century, and if her popularity waned it was not because she allowed her work to become obviously dated. She stayed abreast of the times and was especially fond of new technology. She used a typewriter early on, and she wrote stories that featured telephone operators and automobiles: “A Chariot of Fire” (1909) might be the first short story about stealing cars and hit-and-run accidents. Her decreasing popularity can be attributed to many causes. The American public’s growing distaste for the sentimental meant a decrease in readership. Further, Phelps continued to write about social and cultural trends that were no longer trendy, like spiritualism, and in the face of an increasingly secular public, Phelps continued to hold her Christian reform agenda front and center. The reading public may have moved on at the turn of the twentieth century, but today’s various movements for social and environmental responsibility are not that far removed from those of Phelps. The twenty-eight stories in this collection, chosen from the nearly one hundred and fifty that Phelps published, represent the breadth of her work in terms of tone and topic. They are stories for today’s readers and reformers. Elizabeth Stuart Phelps tells a good story, still, and the things that matter to her do (or should) matter to us.

In her early years, she often published anonymously, and until her marriage, she published her

## Introduction

work as Elizabeth Stuart Phelps or, occasionally, E. S. P. After her marriage, she added Ward to her full name, most of the time. The stories in this collection have all been attributed to Phelps, through her signature or scholarship. Except for the Arthurian stories, “Margaret Bronson” and “Since I Died,” these stories have not been reprinted in contemporary editions. I have grouped the stories into eight thematic chapters, each of which begins with an introduction that will orient readers to its themes and concerns, and to its social milieu. The stories are annotated to further clarify the cultural and historical references they make and rely on. A comprehensive bibliography at the end of the book lists all cited and consulted sources used in the introduction and notes. All of the stories were transcribed from their original periodical publications, which I identify in the notes. I have corrected only obvious typographical errors, and have neither modernized spelling nor punctuation.

## CHAPTER ONE

“A STORY IS A STORY, HOWEVER LARGE”:  
WRITING FOR CHILDREN

How June Found Massa Linkum

Bobbit's Hotel

One Way to Get an Education

The Girl Who Could Not Write a Composition

Mary Elizabeth

## INTRODUCTION

Elizabeth Stuart Phelps purposefully downplayed her work as a writer of children's literature. In *Chapters from a Life*, she describes her first publication of fiction for adults, "A Sacrifice Consumed" in *Harper's Magazine* (1864), as "the beginning of what authors are accustomed to call their 'literary career'" (74). Although her memoirs are very much about her role as a literary woman, she could not completely ignore the many stories, novels, and essays she wrote for young people. She discusses "these tales of piety and of mischief, of war and of home, of babies and of army nurses, of tomboys, and of girls who did their mending and obeyed their mothers" as pleasurable for their variety and for "a considerable dash of fun" (82). Phelps also notes that this work was lucrative: the publisher of the Gypsy Breynton series paid her one hundred and fifty dollars for each of the four novels, a sum she "accepted with incredible gratitude" (85). She clearly appreciated the pleasure and profit that came from this work even as she agreed with the general societal consensus that literature for children was not really literature.

Her ambivalence about her role as an author for children notwithstanding, Phelps was an important figure in this genre. Alongside notable authors like Mark Twain and Louisa May Alcott, she contributed to all the major children's periodicals, from the weekly story paper *The Youth's Companion* to the monthly journals *Our Young Folks* and *St. Nicholas*. Moreover, she wrote for children with purposes similar to those with which she wrote for adults, as she argued that "the province of the artist is to portray life as it is; and life is moral responsibility" (*Chapters* 263). Thus she tells stories meant to entertain, but also to enlighten, children, to show them their society's failures and encourage them to reform and rejuvenate their world. Through her youthful protagonists, Phelps addresses diverse social issues, such as child poverty and homelessness, slavery, and careers for girls. She constructs highly individual and appealing children, like Bobbit and Mary Elizabeth in the stories below, who, without ever having been taught about Christ, offer visions of a different society in their enactment of Christ-like selflessness. With the young African American June, Phelps offers a child who knows only enslavement and suffering but consistently chooses freedom and love. The equally interesting protagonists of "One Way to Get an Education" and "The Girl Who Could Not Write a Composition" call into question social attitudes about class and education, and about gender and the marketplace.

These narratives are as good to read now as they were when their young audiences waited impatiently for the new issue of "the paper" to arrive in the mail. However, they were also stories that called into question the social status quo of class, gender, and race. Where early social workers and Phelps's contemporaries tended to blame the poor for their lot, Phelps recognized the role that social conditions played in turning poverty into viciousness. She wrote hardworking poor and street children while Jane Addams noted the misbehavior of such children and found it "possible to establish a connection between the lack of public recreation and the vicious excitements and trivial amusements which become their substitutes" (107). Addams also lamented that when such children earned money, they "felt themselves free to spend it as they choose in the mist of vice deliberately disguised as pleasure" (5-6). Where Addams suggested that poor children turn to trouble with ease, Charles Loring Brace wavers between seeing street children as optimistic sights and as eyesores. After a lengthy description of the deprivations suffered by homeless boys, Brace notes "Yet, with all this, a more light-hearted youngster than

the street-boy is not to be found” (98), but he also points out that “One of the eye-sores which used to trouble me was the condition of the city behind Trinity Church. Often and often have I walked through Greenwich and Washington Streets, or the narrow lanes of the quarter, watching the ragged, wild children flitting about” (215). Social historian Robert Bremmer details the prevalence of such children in Phelps’s society: “The children of greatest concern to reformers and city officials were homeless, vagrant boys and girls. . . . In 1863, estimates of their numbers ranged as high as 6,000 in Boston and 30,000 in New York” (87). Phelps seems fully aware of the number of children at risk; she was often in Boston and saw them for herself. And Phelps was clearly ahead of her time: like Bremmer she saw homeless children as a reason for concern, rather than the public nuisances and potential perpetrators that the generally well-meaning Brace and Addams found.

In her sympathy for these unfortunates, Phelps finds a literary voice that is both sentimental and powerful. María Carla Sánchez suggests that in the nineteenth century, sentimentality informs writing by reformers and storytellers alike, and “provides the language for their social work, work which invariably broaches questions of cultural representations and women’s control of them” (95). Phelps’s sentimental strategies engender sympathy for the suffering even as they insist that her readers feel responsible for easing that suffering. In the stories that follow, Phelps constructs representations of children for her youthful readers and the adults who read along with them. She offers models of sympathy that call into question cultural practices concerning children, models that ask her readers to both identify with these compelling protagonists and to recognize differences. Most of all, as she writes them as interesting subjects with personalities and histories we want to know, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps compels readers to engage with individuals like June, Bobbit, Jake, Jemima, and Mary Elizabeth in the following stories for children.

## THE STORIES

“How June Found Massa Linkum” appeared in *Our Young Folks* (May 1868): 272-79, and *Sunday Afternoon* 6 (May 1868). In 1868, the story was also reprinted as a picture book by Boston: Ticknor and Fields.

“Bobbit’s Hotel” appeared in *Our Young Folks* 6 (Aug. 1870): 482-87.

“One Way to Get an Education” appeared in *The Youth’s Companion* 11 May 1871 (44.10): 1.

“The Girl Who Could Not Write a Composition” was published in *Our Young Folks*. 7 (Aug.–Sep. 1871): 467-69, 540-44.

“Mary Elizabeth” appeared in *St. Nicholas* 7 (Feb. 1880): 316-19. Phelps anthologized it in her collection *Fourteen to One* (Boston: Houghton, 1891: 371-80).

## HOW JUNE FOUND MASSA LINKUM

June laid down her knives upon the scrubbing-board, and stole softly out into the yard.

Madame Joilet was taking a nap up stairs, and, for a few minutes at least, the coast seemed to be quite clear.

Who was June? and who was Madame Joilet?<sup>1</sup>

June was a little girl who had lived in Richmond ever since she could remember, who had never been outside of the city boundaries, and who had a vague idea that the North lay just above the Chickahominy and the Gulf of Mexico about a mile below the James. She could not tell A from Z, nor the figure 1 from 40; and whenever Madame Joilet made those funny little curves and dots and blots with pen and ink, in drawing up her bills to send in to lodgers up stairs, June considered that she was moved thereto by witches. Her authority for this theory lay in a charming old woman across the way, who had one tooth, and wore a yellow cap, and used to tell her ghost stories sometimes in the evening.

Somebody asked June once how old she was.

“‘Spect I’s a hundred,—dunno,” she said gravely. Exactly how old she was nobody knew. She was not tall enough to be more than seven, but her face was like the face of a little old woman. It was a queer little face, with thick lips and low forehead, and great mournful eyes. There was something strange about these eyes. Whenever they looked at one, they seemed to cry right out, as if they had a voice. But no one in Richmond cared about that. Nobody cared about June at all. When she was unhappy, no one asked what was the matter; when she was hungry, or cold, or frightened, Madame Joilet laughed at her, and when she was sick, she beat her. If she broke a teacup, or spilled a mug of coffee, she had her ears boxed or was shut up in a terrible dark cellar, where the rats were as large as kittens. If she tried to sing a little in her sorrowful, smothered way, over her work, Madame Joilet shook her for making so much noise. When she stopped she scolded her for being sulky. Nothing that she could do ever happened to be right; everything was sure to be wrong. She had not half enough to eat, nor half enough to wear. What was worse than that, she had nobody to kiss, and nobody to kiss her; nobody to love her and pet her; nobody in all the wide world to care whether she lived or died, except a half-starved kitten that lived in the wood-shed. For June was black, and a slave; and this Frenchwoman, Madam Joilet, was her mistress.

Exactly what was the use of living under such circumstances June never could clearly see. She cherished a secret notion that, if she could find a little grave all dug out somewhere in a

*How June found Massa Linkum.*



---

<sup>1</sup> Given her status as June’s jailer, Madame Joilet’s name may be a pun on the famous Joliet Penitentiary founded in 1858. In the period following Emancipation, freed black children, particularly those orphaned, were often held as slaves or sold into slavery, or pressed into apprenticeships that amounted to slavery. The Freedmen’s Bureau was formed to respond to the needs of these refugees, and built orphanages in Richmond, Atlanta, and Nashville.



clover-field, she would creep in and hide there. Madame Joilet could not find her then. People who lived in graves were not supposed to be hungry; and, if it were ever so cold, they never shivered. That they could not be beaten was a natural consequence, because there was so much earth between, that you would n't feel. The only objection would be leaving Hungry. Hungry was the kitten June had named it so because it was black. She had an idea that everything black was hungry, in the nature of things.

That there had been a war, June had gathered from old Creline, who told the ghost stories.<sup>2</sup> What it was all about she did not know. Madame Joilet said terrible giants, called Yankees, were coming down to eat up all the little black girls in Richmond. Creline said that the Yankees were the Messiah's people, and were coming to set the negroes free. Who the Messiah was June did not know; but she had heard vague legends from Creline of old-timed African princes, who lived in great free forests, and sailed on sparkling rivers in boats of painted bark, and she thought that he must be one of them.

Now, this morning, Creline had whispered mysteriously to June, as she went up the street to sell some eggs for Madame Joilet, that Massa Linkum was coming that very day.<sup>3</sup> June knew nothing about Massa Linkum, and nothing about those grand, immortal words of his which had made every slave in Richmond free; it had never entered Madame Joilet's plan that she would know. No one can tell, reasoned Madame, what notions the little nigger will get if she finds it out. She might even ask for wages, or take a notion to learn to read, or run away, or something. June saw no one; she kept her prudently in the house. Tell her? *Non, non, impossible!*

But June had heard the beautiful news this morning, like all the rest; and June was glad, though she had not the slightest idea why. So, while her mistress was safely asleep up stairs, she had stolen out to watch for the wonderful sight,—the mysterious sight that every one was waiting to see.

She was standing there on tiptoe on the fence, in her little ragged dress, with black kitten in her arms, when a great crowd turned a corner, and up a cloud of dust, and swept up the street. There were armed soldiers with glittering uniforms, and there were flags flying, and merry voices shouting and blessings distinct upon the air. There were long lines of dusky faces upturned, and wet with happy tears. There were angry faces, too, scowling from windows, and lurking in dark corners.<sup>4</sup>

It swept on, and it swept up, and June stood still, and held her breath to seek and saw, in the midst of it all, a tall man dressed in black. He had a thin, white face, sad-eyed and kindly and quiet, and he was bowing and smiling to the people on either side.

“God bress yer, Massa Linkum, God bress yer!” shouted the happy voices; and then there was a chorus of wild hurrahs, and June laughed outright for glee and lifted up her little thin voice and cried, “Bress yer, Massa Linkum!” with the rest, and knew no more than the kitty what she did it in.

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<sup>2</sup> Phelps uses a certain amount of dialect in this and other stories; Creline is likely a version of Caroline or Coraline.

<sup>3</sup> Massa Linkum is the president whose leadership led to the Civil War (1861-1865) and the Emancipation Proclamation (1863).

<sup>4</sup> Phelps's story of June seems inspired in part by Abraham Lincoln's historic visit to Richmond on 4 April 1865; his walk through the streets on with a huge crowd of emancipated slaves was depicted widely in the press and postbellum American art. Lincoln was shot ten days later and died on 15 April 1865.

## How June Found Massa Linkum

The great man turned, and saw June standing alone in the sunlight, the wind blowing her ragged dress, her little black shoulders just reaching to the top of the fence, her wide-open, mournful eyes, and the kitten squeezed in her arms. And he looked right at her, O, so kindly! And gave her a smile all to herself,—one of his rare smiles, with a bit of a quiver in it,—and bowed, and was gone.

“Take me ’long wid yer, Massa Linkum, Massa Linkum!” called poor June, faintly. But no one heard her; and the crowd swept on, and June’s voice broke into a cry, and the hot tears came, and she laid her face down on Hungry to hide them. You see, in all her life, no one had ever looked so at poor June before.

“June, June, come here!” called a sharp voice from the house. But June was sobbing so hard that she did not hear.

“*Venez ici,—vite, vite!* June! *Voilà!* The little nigger will be the death of me. She tears my heart. June, *vite*, I say!”<sup>5</sup>

June started, and jumped down from the fence, and ran into the house with great frightened eyes.

“I just did n’t mean to, noways, missus. I want to see Massa Linkum, an’ he look at me, an’ I done forgot eberything. O missus, don’ beat me dis yere time, an’ I’ll neber—“

But Madame Joilet interrupted her with a box on the ear, and dragged her up stairs. There was a terrible look on Madame’s face. Just what happened up stairs, I have not the heart to tell you.

That night, June was crouched, sobbing and bruised and bleeding, behind the kitchen stove, when Creline came in on an errand for her mistress. Madame Joilet was obliged to leave the room for a few moments, and the two were alone together. June crawled out from behind the stove.

“I see him,—I see Massa Linkum, Creline.”

“De Lord bress him foreber ’n’ eber. Amen!” exclaimed Creline fervently throwing up her old thin hands.

June crept a little nearer, and looked all around the room to see if the doors were shut.

“Creline, what’s he done gone come down here fur? Am he de Messiah?”

“Bress yer soul, chile! don’ ye know better ’n *dat* ar?”

“Don’ know nuffin,” said June, sullenly. “Neber knows nuffin; ’spects I neber’s gwine to. Can’ go out in de road to fine out,—she beat me. Can’ ask nuffin,—she jest gib me a push down cellar. O Creline, der’s *sech* rats down dar now,—dar is!”

“Yer poor critter!” said Creline, with great contempt for her ignorance. “Why, Massa Linkum, eberybody knows ’bout he! He’s done gone made we free,—whole heap on we.”

“Free!” echoed June, with puzzled eyes.

“Laws, yes, chile; ’pears like yer’s dreffful stupid. Yer don’ b’long—” Creline lowered her voice to a mysterious whisper, and looked carefully at the closed door,—“yer don’ b’long to Missus Jolly no more dan she b’long to you, an dat’s de trufe now, ’case Massa Linkum say so,—God bress him.”

Just then Madame Joilet came back.

“What’s that you’re talking about?” she said sharply.

“June was jes’ sayin’ what a heap she tink ob you, missus,” said Creline, with a grave face.

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<sup>5</sup> *Venez ici,—vite, vite!*: “Come here! Quickly, quickly!”

June lay awake a long time that night, thinking about Massa Linkum, and the wonderful news Creline had brought, and wondering when Madame Joilet would tell her that she was free.

But many days passed, and Madame said nothing about it. Creline's son had left his master and gone North. Creline herself had asked and obtained scanty for her work. A little black boy across the street had been sentenced to receive twenty-five lashes for some trifling fault, and they had just begun to beat him in the yard, when a Union officer stepped up and stopped them. A little girl, not a quarter of a mile away, whose name June had often heard, had just found her father, who had been sold away from her years ago, and had come into Richmond with the Yankee soldiers. But nothing had happened to June. Everything went on as in the old days before Massa Linkum came. She washed dishes, and scrubbed knives, and carried baskets of wood, so heavy that she tottered under their weight, and was scolded if she dropped so much as a shaving on the floor; she swept the rooms with a broom three times as tall as she was, and had her ears boxed because she could not get the dust up with such tiny hands. She worked and scrubbed and ran on errands from morning to night, till her feet ached so that she cried out with the pain. She was whipped and scolded and threatened and frightened and shaken, just as she had been ever since she could remember. She was kept shut up like a prisoner in the house, with Madame Joilet's cold gray eyes forever on her, and her sharp voice forever in her ear. And still not a word was said about Massa Linkum and the beautiful freedom he had given to all such as little June, and not a word did June dare to say.

But June *thought*. Madame Joilet could not help that. If Madame had known just what June was thinking, she would have tried hard to help it.

Well, so the days passed, and the weeks, and still Madame said not a word; and still she whipped and scolded and shook, and June worked and cried, and nothing happened. But June had not done all her thinking for nothing.

One night Creline was going by the house, when June called to her softly through the fence.

“Creline!”

“What's de matter?” said Creline, who was in a great hurry.

“I's gwine to fine Massa Linkum,—don' yer tell nobody.”

“Laws a massy, what a young un dat ar chile is!” said Creline, thinking that June had just waked up from a dream, and forthwith forgetting all about her.

Madame Joilet always locked June into her room, which was nothing but a closet with a window in it, and a heap of rags for a bed. On this particular night she turned the key as usual, and then went to her own room at the other end of the house, where she was soon soundly asleep.

About eleven o'clock, when all the house was still, the window of June's closet softly opened. There was a roofed door-way just underneath it, with an old grape-vine trellis running up one side of it. A little dark figure stepped out timidly on the narrow, steep roof, clinging with its hands to keep its balance, and then down upon the trellis, which it began to crawl slowly down. The old wood creaked and groaned and trembled, and the little figure trembled and stood still. If it should give way, and fall crashing to the ground!

She stood a minute looking down; then she took a slow, careful step; then another, and another, hand under hand upon the bars. The trellis creaked and shook and cracked, but it held on, and June held on, and dropped softly down, gasping and terrified at what she had done, all in a little heap on the grass below.

She lay there a moment perfectly still. She could not catch her breath at first, and she trembled so that she could not move.

## How June Found Massa Linkum

Then she crept along on tiptoe to the wood-shed. She ran a great risk in opening the wood-shed door, for the hinges were rusty, and it creaked with a terrible noise. But Hungry was in there. She could not go without Hungry. She went in, and called in a faint whisper. The kitten knew her, dark as it was, and ran out from the wood-pile with a joyful mew, to rub itself against her dress.

“We’s gwine to fine Massa Linkum, you an’ me, bof two togeder,” said June.

“Pur! pur-r-r!” said Hungry, as if she were quite content; and June took her up in her arms, and laughed softly. How happy they would be, she and Hungry! and how Massa Linkum would smile and wonder when saw them coming in! and how Madame Joilet would hunt and scold!

She went out of the wood-shed and out of the yard, hushing the soft laugh on her lips, and holding her breath as she passed under her mistress’s window. She had heard Creline say that Massa Linkum had gone back to the North; so she walked up the street a little way, and then she turned aside into the vacant squares and unpaved roads, and so out into the fields, where no one could see her.

It was very still and very dark. The great trees stood up like giants against the sky, and the wind howled hoarsely through them. It made June think of the blood-hounds that she had seen rushing with horrible yells to the swamps, where hunted slaves were hiding.

“I reckon ’t ain’t on’y little ways, Hungry,” she said with a shiver; “we’ll git dar ’fore long. Don’ be ’fraid.”

“Pur! pur-r-r!” said Hungry, nestling her head in warmly under June’s arm.

“’Spect *you* lub me, Hungry,—’spect you does!”

And then June laughed out softly once more. What would Massa Linkum say to the kitty? Had he ever seen such a kitty as that in all his life?

So she folded her arms tightly over Hungry’s soft fur, and trudged away into the woods. She began to sing a little as she walked, in that sorrowful, smothered way that made Madame Joilet angry. Ah, that was all over now! There would be no more scolding and beating, no more tired days, no more terrible nights spent in the dark and lonely cellar, no more going to bed without her supper, and crying herself to sleep. Massa Linkum would never treat her so. She never once doubted, in that foolish little trusting heart of hers, that he would be glad to see her, and Hungry too. Why should she? Was there any one in all the world who had looked so at poor little June?

So one and away, deep into the woods and swamps, she trudged cheerily; and she sang low to Hungry, and Hungry purred to her. The night passed on and the stars grew pale, the woods deepened and thickened, the swamps were cold and wet, the brambles scratched her hands and feet.

“It’s jes’ ober here little ways, Hungry,”—trying to laugh. “We’ll fine him purty soon. I’s terrible an’—sleepy, Hungry.”

She sat down then on a heap of leaves to rest, and laid her head down upon her arm, and Hungry mewed a little, and curled up in her neck. The next she knew, the sun was shining. She jumped up frightened and puzzled, and then she remembered where she was, and began to think of breakfast. But there were no berries but the poisonous dog-wood, and nothing else to be seen but leaves and grass and bushes. Hungry snapped up a few grasshoppers and looked longingly at an unattainable squirrel, who was flying from tree-top to tree-top; then they went slowly on.

About noon they came to a bit of a brook. June scooped up the water in her hands, and Hungry lapped it with her pink tongue. But there was no dinner to be found, and no sign of

Massa Linkum; the sun was like a great ball of fire above the tree-tops, and the child grew faint and weak.

“I did n’t ’spect it was so fur,” groaned poor June. “But don’ yer be ’feared now, Hungry. ’Pears like we’ll fine him bery soon.”

The sun went down, and the twilight came. No supper, and no sign of Massa Linkum yet. Nothing but the great forest and the swamps and the darkening shadows and the long, hungry night. June lay down once more on the damp ground where the poisonous snakes hid in the bushes, and hugged Hungry with her weak little arms, and tried to speak out bravely: “We’ll fine him, Hungry, sure, to-morrer. He’ll jes’ open de door an’ let us right in, he will; an’ he’ll hab breakfas’ all ready an’ waitin’, ’pears like he’ll hab a dish ob milk up in de corner for you now,—tink o’ dat ar, Hungry!” and then the poor little voice that tried to be so brave broke down into a great sob. “Ef I on’y jes’ had one little mouthful now, Hungry!—on’y one!”

So another night passed, and another morning came. A faint noise woke June from her uneasy sleep, when the sun was hardly up. It was Hungry, purring loudly at her ear. A plump young robin lay quivering between her paws. She was tossing it to and fro with curves and springs of delight. She laid the poor creature down by June’s face, looking proudly from June to it, saying as plainly as words could say, “Here’s a fine breakfast. I got it on purpose for you. Why don’t you eat, for pity’s sake? There are plenty more where this came from!”

But June turned away her eyes and moaned; and Hungry, in great perplexity, made way with the robin herself.

Presently June crawled feebly to her feet, and pushed on through the brambles. The kitten, purring in her arms, looked so happy and contented with her breakfast that the child cried out at the sight as if in sudden pain.

“O, I tought we’d git dar ’fore now, an’ I tought he’d jes’ be so glad to see us!”—and then presently, “He jes’ look so kinder smilin’ right out ob his eyes, Hungry!”

A bitter wind blew from the east that day, and before noon the rain was falling, dreary and chilly and sharp. It soaked June’s feet and ragged dress, and pelted in her face. The wind blew against her, and whirled about her, and tossed her to and fro,—she was such a little thing, and so weak now and faint.

Just as early twilight fell from the leaden sky, and the shadows began to skulk under the bushes, and the birds gathered to their nests with sleepy twitter, she tripped over a little stone, fell weakly to the ground, and lay still. She had not the strength to get to her feet again.

But somehow June felt neither troubled nor afraid. She lay there with her face upturned to the pelting rain, watching it patter from leaf to leaf, listening to the chirp of the birds in the nests, listening to the crying of the wind. She liked the sound. She had a dim notion that it was like an old camp-meeting hymn that she had heard Creline sing sometimes. She never understood the words, but the music came back like a dream. She wondered if Massa Linkum ever heard it. She thought *he looked like it*. She should like to lie there all night and listen to it; and then in the morning they would go on and find him,—in the morning; it would come very soon.

The twilight deepened, and the night came on. The rain fell faster, and the sharp wind cried aloud.

“It’s—berly cold,” said June, sleepily, and turned her face over to hide it on the kitten’s warm, soft fur. “Goo’ night, Hungry. We’ll git dar to-morrer. We’s mos’ dar, Hungry.”

Hungry curled up close to her cold, wet cheek—Hungry did not care how black it was—with a happy answering mew; but June said nothing more.

## How June Found Massa Linkum

The rain fell faster, and the sharp wind cried aloud. The kitten woke from a nap, and purred for her to stir and speak; but June said nothing more.

Still the rain fell, and the wind cried; and the long night and the storm and the darkness passed, and the morning came.

Hungry stirred under June's arm, and licked her face, and mewed piteously at her ear. But June's arm lay still, and June said no word.

Somewhere, in a land where there was never slave and never mistress, where there were no more hungry days and frightened nights, little June was laughing softly, and had found some one to love her at last.

And so she did not find Massa Linkum after all?

Ah!—who would have guessed it? To that place where June had gone, where there are no masters and no slaves, he had gone before her.

And don't I suppose his was the first face she saw, as she passed through the storm and the night to the waiting, beautiful place? And don't I suppose he smiled as he had smiled before, and led her gently to that other Face, that thorn-crowned Face, of which poor little June had known nothing in all her life? Of course I do.

## BOBBIT'S HOTEL

A little fellow, not much higher than a yard-stick, stunted and stubbed like a dwarf pear-tree; as dirty as the mud under his feet; as ragged as the Coliseum after the great gale; with little restless, grimy hands; with little restless, snapping eyes; with a little restless, hungry mouth—bare feet (or nearly,—he wore some holes with a little shoe to them), bare hands, bare knees sticking through his trousers, a hat without a rim,—a boy without a bed,—that was Bobbit.

It was six o'clock of a January night, and storming too. Bobbit was standing—never mind the name of the street—but he was standing at the foot of it (it was in Boston), in a little snow-drift, up to his knees. The sleet went down his neck, and up his sleeves, and into the holes in his trousers, and into the holes with a little shoe on them; it hung in a fringe on his old hat, and swung to and fro like the fringe which ladies wear headed with guipure lace upon their cloaks. Bobbit thought of that, looking out from behind the little icicles; he had seen a great many handsome cloaks that day; it was what he called a "handsome day"; something was going on at the Music Hall, I believe, and the streets had been as full of pretty things as the sky was of sunlight, till the clouds and the sleet came up. For there is a greater difference in the streets than you would ever suspect, unless you should belong to them, and have nothing to do but watch them like Bobbit. They have their "scrub-days" and their dress-days, like you or me or anybody else but Bobbit, whose whole little life had been a "scrub-day," from beginning to end, —and neither you nor I nor anybody else but just Bobbit himself can know, I suppose, what that may mean.

"It's a brick of a night to have supper," said Bobbit, standing in the snow-drift,—“a brick.”

Bobbit talked slang, to be sure, never having enjoyed the benefits of what we call a "liberal education"; yet I am not sure, after all, that a Harvard graduate would have understood Bobbit if he had stood in the snow-drift and heard what he said. In fact, you would have to know that Bobbit did not have a supper every night, to understand it altogether. And even then I do not think you would understand it, unless you were to go without your supper two or three nights—or even one—yourself.

Tuesday Bobbit had a dinner; Monday he picked up quite a breakfast; to-day he would have had a dinner and a supper too, it had been so stormy; there had been a good many gentlemen afraid to leave their horses; Bobbit had learned from long experience to tell by the color of a horse, or by his hoofs or his ears, whether he would be restless in a sleet storm. He had earned ten cents since noon holding cream-colored horses with black manes, and five for a little mouse-colored mare just shaved.

Bobbit carried half his snow-drift into a baker's shop with him. His eyes twinkled a little like the feathers of a shuttlecock when you play fast. Was it not enough to justify any one in feeling like a shuttlecock to have three days' living in his pocket? For you see five cents would buy you two little rolls and a doughnut; and to live for two days on ten cents' worth of baked beans, why, nothing could be easier; especially if you saved your ten cents and took your beans hot to-morrow noon.

Now when Bobbit had got into the baker's shop and bought his doughnut, he saw two little Irish boys looking in at the baker's window.

"That's a pity!" said Bobbit; for the two little boys stood quite still, flattening their noses on the glass; they had ragged hats and holes in their shoes, and they stood in a snow-drift as Bobbit had done. Now when two little boys will stand still in the throat of a sleet-storm to look

## Bobbit's Hotel

in at a baker's window, it generally means that they do it for good reasons; and Bobbit had done it so many times himself, that he looked very wise when he said, "That's a pity." He looked at his doughnut too, then at the window, then at the doughnut; so, back and forth, as he would if he had been dodging a Haymarket Square policeman.

"I will take three doughnuts," said he to the baker, with a little gulp, "and three cents' worth more of bread. Now I've got three cents left. Won't you just hand over a few cold beans?"

So the baker gave him the bread and the doughnuts and the cold beans, and Bobbit came out into the drift.

"Halloo," said he.

"'Loo," said the Irish boys both together.

"Got any grub?" asked Bobbit. This was pointed, if not elegant, you see.

"Nery," said the Irish boys with equal emphasis.

"Belong to anybody?" continued Bobbit.

"Not much."

"Anywheres to put up?"

"You bet not!"

"I live in a hotel," said Bobbit, with an air.

"Oh!" said the boys.

"I take in folks," continued Bobbit, magnificently, "once in a while; free grettis. I'll lodge you and board you till mornin'. You just hold your tongue and look spry. Then tag after."

There was a little smell of cold beans and hot doughnuts all about Bobbit. The Irish boys followed him like two little dogs, asking no questions; they held their heads out, and licked their lips.

Bobbit wound in and out like a crochet-needle through loops of streets. The two boys "looked spry" and "tagged after." Bobbit did not speak; he kept his eyes on stray policemen and his hat over his eyes.

"It's better'n the lock-up," he said once over his shoulder. "On fair nights it's nobody's business. When it comes to drifts and sech, them chaps with brass buttons keeps their eyes peeled. Took me up once last winter fur roostin' in a barrel. I was a gone goose fur fifteen days. Take it in general, I'm independent in my way of life—hold on there! That's the railroad. There's a ditch the off side of *you!* It's skeery travellin' fur a stranger. But we've got about there."

"About there" was quite out of the loops of streets, out of the netted alleys, out of the knotted lanes that tied the great city in. The three children had wandered off upon the windy, oozy Charlestown flats, where there was an ugly purple mist, and much slush and lumber and old boots and ash heaps and wrecks of things.

"There's my hotel," said Bobbit at last.

The Irish boys looked,—north, east, south, west,—looked again and looked hard. They saw nothing but an old wall of an old burned building that hid them a little from the road, and the road from them, a pile of bare bleached timber, and an old locomotive boiler, rusty, and half buried in a heap of rubbish. But the cold beans and the doughnuts were in Bobbit's pockets, and faith in Bobbit was in their hearts.

"Now," said Bobbit, with an amazing chuckle for a boy who was going to give tomorrow's dinner to another boy, "you walk right along as ef you was going to walk a mile, and



when you see I’ve doven—*dive!*” The next they knew after that, Bobbit had “doven” into the old engine boiler, and they after him.

“There now!” said Bobbit, grandly, “what do you think of *this* fur a cheap hotel?”

The storm seemed all at once to have stopped; the great curve of the boiler shut it out; only a dim, dull roar, like that of distant machinery or fire or river-dams, sounded about them. Bobbit pulled up an old hogshead top against the open mouth of the boiler; this made it very dark, but almost warm, in the hotel. The little Irish boys felt around with their hands, and found that there were dry leaves, salt hay, and pieces of a worn-out something—jacket perhaps—underneath them.

“Mattress, bedclo’es, carpet, sofy, all to order, and all to once, gentlemen,” said Bobbit. “Fust-class furniture in *my* hotel! Hold on a spell till I turn on the gas.” All in a minute a wonderful thing happened. A little pink candle blazed up and burned; it had an old nut-socket for a candlestick; it stood quite firm and shone distinctly on the beans and doughnuts.

“Gener’lly speaking, I can eat in the dark,” said Bobbit, “but when it comes to company I can’t.”

The fact was that Bobbit had just six matches and this little penny pink candle put away under a corner of his hotel “sofy” on purpose for “company.” Nobody knows now—I wish that somebody did—how much “company” Bobbit had entertained in his hotel.

“It does n’t burn not so long as it might,” said Bobbit, with a jerk at the penny candle. “Better fall to while you can see the way to your mouth.”

So they “fell to”; and the Irish boys ate up the beans, to begin with; but Bobbit did not say anything about to-morrow’s dinner.

“Got any names to you?” said he, as they broke the last doughnut into three pieces and ate it slowly, to make it last as long as the candle did.

“Not many to tell on,” said the larger of the little guests with his mouth full. “The woman as we run beggin’ fur till she was took up fur dhrink last summer, she called us Harum and Scarum jest. I’m Harum. He’s Scarum.”<sup>1</sup>

“I’ve heerd worse names ’n that, I’m sure,” said Bobbit, politely.

By and by the doughnut was all gone, and the candle too. Bobbit blew out the last pink spark, and it grew very dark in the hotel.

“Kind o’ chilly too,” said the little landlord. “Chillier’n common. The storm must have riz. Sometimes it blows in. But ’t ain’t often I can’t keep most cumf’t’ble in my rear soot of rooms. You just crawl in fur’s you can go, and stick yer feet into them old jacket sleeves. There’ll be one apiece fur both on ye. Them’s my foot-muffs. I take a sight o’ heat out on ’em. A chap as I lodged here last month, as went to the school-ship fur loafin’, he left it to me to ‘settle my bill,’ says he. I took it very well of that chap. He was sick here a week and two days. But I did n’t ax fur his jacket. I told him we’d charge it till his ship come in. But you see it turned out as he come into the ship. You crawl over, there! them’s my fust-class apartments. Cumf’t’ble?”

“*Some!*” said Harum.

“I hain’t been so warrm, not since the last thaw, at all, at all,” said Scarum, sleepily. Indeed, Scarum was sound asleep by the time he had said it; and Harum was asleep by the time

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<sup>1</sup> Generally the phrase “harum-scarum” means to act irresponsibly or recklessly. One wonders who Phelps considered as acting in such a way, the children or the parents who left them homeless.

## Bobbit's Hotel

that Scarum was. They curled up in the school-ship boy's jacket, like two little puppies, with their heads under their arms and their mouths open. In fact, they seemed a great deal more like little dogs than they did like little boys. But Bobbit did not think of this; they were very much like all his lodgers.

"Babies," he said to himself, twisting himself together to keep warm, "Jest babies. Now, I'd like to know what 'ud ha' become o' them two *this* night, ef I did n't happen to keep hotel. Wh-e-ew!"

*This* night was growing quite cold enough to emphasize. Bobbit was a little surprised it grew so cold. You see he was used to sleeping in the "first class rooms," over under the jacket and the hay. Right here in the lips of the boiler it was icy and wet. The wind puffed in at the cracks where the hoghead top did not fit; it seemed as if the hotel were drawing in great breaths, like an animal, into its iron lungs. The sleet, too, shot in little broadsides of it, cutting and cold; Bobbit's hands bled where it struck them; but it was so dark that he did not know it.

"The wind's the wrong way," said Bobbit, "my front door'll be down afore morning. Heigh—o!—Harum?"

Harum was asleep.

"Scarum?"

Scarum was asleep.

"Warm as toast," said Bobbit, feeling of them. "Wonder ef they could spare me the jacket."

But after some thought he concluded not to take the jacket. The storm was screaming horribly, overhead, this side, that side, all about, and the wind still the wrong way. If the front door should go down the jacket would not be any too much for his little lodgers.

"I won't ask fur't," said Bobbit, with a little grim smile. "I brung 'em in here. I won't ax fur the jacket."

So he did not ask for the jacket, and by and by the door went down.

"Seems to me I never knew sech a night; not so much like notched knives," said poor Bobbit; for the boiler gaped cruelly and drew in long breaths of the storm upon him. The snow swept in, and the wind; the sleet crusted over his bleeding fingers and in his hair. It was very dark; often, when the wind was the wrong way, and that front door went down, he could see stars through the rusty gums of the creature,—the boiler seemed more like a creature than like a hotel after all, sometimes,—but now it opened into blank blackness and noise.

It was very, very cold. Bobbit had been very cold before, but never so cold as this. He looked over at the "best soot" where his little lodgers lay, and thought how warm it must be in there. He kept the edge of the storm from the little boys, you see; it struck and broke upon his own poor little freezing flesh. If he could change places with Harum and Scarum! If he could only change places for a little while!

But Bobbit shook his head hard at himself.

"That's one way to keep a hotel! Put folks into yer front entries and freeze 'em afore mornin'!"

But it was bitter cold! Bobbit felt bitten and gnawed all over.

"I should ha' liked the—jacket,—but I won't. No, I won't," said Bobbit. He put his head down upon his arm; the snow had drifted in high and soft; his arm and his head went down into it, like a cold cushion.

"I'll have a white pillar-case at any rate," said Bobbit, slowly, wondering why he did n't laugh at his own joke. "And I won't—no, I won't—they was company. And sech babies. Folks

as keeps hotels must put up—with—onconvenience. It’s somethin’ to hev a white-pillar-case of yer own—now.”

The little hotel-keeper sunk lower and lower into his white pillar-case. The hotel door gaped steadily. All the front entry filled with snow. There was so much snow, that the boiler choked and gaped no longer to the black night. Instead, it grew dully white and warm, so the little lodgers in the best rooms thought, when they waked each other up once in the night, by trying to get their four feet into one of the jacket sleeves. They called out to Bobbit, but he lay quite still in the front entry, and made no answer. So they thought how comfortable they were, and went to sleep again.

Now, in the morning, there was a great noise inside the boiler, and outside too, for that matter. For Bobbit’s hotel was drifted and drowned almost out of sight and breath by the piling snow; and Bobbit’s little lodgers, when they found it out, whined and whooped till a policeman and a butcher and two shovels came to dig them out.

“Puppies,” said the policeman, letting sunlight in, “froze up here over night. “A batch of pup—Hal—loo!”

For his shovel struck hard on something, and it was not a puppy. It was the little hotel-keeper on his white pillow-case, asleep and cold; so sound asleep and so cold, that neither the policeman nor the butcher nor Harum nor Scarum could wake him, though they tried their best for an hour.

“He give them other young uns the warmth of the whole freezing concern!” said the policeman, talking very fast. “That’s what I call *g-r-i-t!*”

Harum and Scarum called it a pity. They did not know what else to call it.

“A norful pity,” said Harum, as they were marched off to the Little Wanderer’s Home.

“Where’s he gone to?” whispered Scarum, looking frightened.

“Purrgetorry, mebbe,” suggested Harum.

“Will he kape hotel in Purrgetorry?” asked Scarum, after a very little very stupid thought.

“It’s the praste as knows. I doant,” said Harum.

Now Scarum was thinking a very curious thing. “If he kapes hotel in Purrgetorry,” said Scarum to himself, “I hope they’ll give him tree cumf’t’bles, and coald beans every day, jist.” But he did not think about it long enough to say it; and he would n’t have known how to say it, if he had. Besides, that is the end of the story.



## ONE WAY TO GET AN EDUCATION

“Is marm,  
I suppose  
disadvantages—  
being both a  
By-and-by, when  
physician in every  
time surely  
in?” will come as  
respectfully as it  
Blue-pill’s steps,  
Though now I  
know but the little  
an unusual  
confidence in my  
than a masculine and satiric fling at my sex.



ONE WAY TO GET AN EDUCATION.

the doctor, in?”<sup>1</sup>  
that will be one of the  
for a little while—of  
doctor and a “marm.”  
there is a woman  
town—in the good  
coming, “Is doctor  
naturally and  
comes now on old Dr.  
across the street.  
think of it, I do not  
fellow intended rather  
exhibition of  
professional capacity,

However that may be, “Marm, the doctor,” preparing attenuations of aconite in the little back office, laid down her bottle of tincture, promptly, and went to the door.<sup>2</sup>

Did I say a little fellow? It was a *very* little fellow. By a stretch of imagination you might have said that the tip end of the tip-top lock of his ragged hairs reached to the door-knob. His clothes were as ragged as his hair, and were covered with lint and dust.

“Why, Bob!” said I. Bob was an old friend and patient; I had sewed up two broken heads for him, and taken him through scarlet fever, mumps and measles.

“Taint me,” said Bob. “It’s Jake. He’s got smashed into the mills, and boss sent me after ye. Golly! You’d ought to seen him. I seen him. Jammed his finger clean off into the gearing.”

I had my hat and rubber-boots on before Bob had finished his message, and we started off together at a fast walk, splashing through the spring mud.

<sup>1</sup> While Phelps continued to discuss the need for female physicians in her work, her most extending writing on the topic occurs in the novel *Doctor Zay* (1882), a novel about a radical homeopathic practitioner; Marm the doctor also seems to follow this school of medicine.

<sup>2</sup> Aconite, from the ranunculaceae/buttercup family, also known as monkshood or wolfsbane, is a homeopathic remedy commonly used to cure sore throats and fevers through the nineteenth-century and today. Through the nineteenth century, aconite was the best available treatment for diphtheria because of its ability to relieve sore throat and reduce fever (98).

“Poor Jake!” I said, between the splashes; not that I had the least idea who Jake was, but that I knew any Jake must be a poor Jake, who had lost a finger in the gearing.

“I tell you,” said Bob, in his confidential way—for his size, Bob has the most confidential manner of any gentleman of my acquaintance—“I tell *you!* I don’t call him none of yer ‘poor Jakes!’”

“That’s a pity,” said marm, the doctor, abstractedly.

“No, ’taint, neither,” said Bob, the confident, stoutly. “It’s *my* ’pinion them chaps puts their fingers into the gearing a puppuss.”

“*What?*” Marm, the doctor, suddenly attentive.

“Yes, *sir!*” said Bob, mysteriously. “That’s my ’pinion, marm. They puts their fingers in a puppuss.”

“But what could possibly”—

“To git out. They puts in their fingers and then *they* puts out. Jim Shanks he done it. He loafed three weeks ’fore he healed over. He done it just in skatin’-time, and he had a pair o’ new rockers, Christmas, that he hadn’t tried. And *I* think,” said Bob, with an injured air, “it’s mighty hard on chaps as has to stay to work industrious. If I was a doctor, I’d take a hatchet to Jake. There! there’s where he lives—little yaller house ’tother side the road. That’s his mar to the door, hollerin’ behind her apron. I hope ye’ll make Jake holler!”

With this charitable wish Bob splashed back to his work, and I splashed over to the little yellow house where Jake’s “mar” stood “hollerin’.”

She stopped when I came up, and took me in to see my patient, drying her eyes as she went.

My patient stood up straight in the middle of the room. It was a queer little patient. He was white to the lips, and covered with blood, and he trembled all over with pain, like a little hurt dog; but he did not cry out nor speak.

“Sit down,” said I.

Jake obeyed, very reluctantly.

“He haint set down before,” said his mother. “I couldn’t make him. He jest stood there and stood there. O, the Lord have mercy!”

For Jake when he sat down, sank down; sank a little more, a little more; then doubled up and fell,—or would have fallen. I caught him half way to the floor.

“An’ he’s fented!” cried his mother. And of course he had.

“I knew I should,” said the boy, as soon as he opened his eyes, “if I set down.”

When Jake opened his eyes I looked into them. They were odd little eyes; set back far in his head, black as jet, and as restless as a star behind a cloud on a windy night. When they looked at me they snapped. Jake had an odd mouth, too, twisted like a cable-rope.

“Very well,” said I, when Jake and I had looked at each other. “Where’s that hand? Hold it out, Jake!”

Jake held it out.

All the “marm” in me had the heart-ache at sight of that hand. It was such a little hand to put knives and forceps into, without so much as saying poor fellow! But Jake and I had understood each other, when I looked into his little snapping eyes. He wanted to be doctored, not to be “marmed.” The less fuss the better, for Jake. I might as well throw scalding water at his hand as to say poor Jake! He was quite contented with “Hold it out!”

So he held out the little grimy, bloody hand. I put in the probe; Jake shut his snapping eyes. I took it out; Jake shut his twisted mouth. I laid the hand down gently.

## One Way To Get an Education

“Well?” said Jake, with his eyes still shut.

“You’ve done a bad thing by that middle finger, I suppose you know, Jake.”

“Wrenched her right off.” Jake nodded. “I should ha’ lost my arm, if I hadn’t. She jest twisted off, and snapped. Bob Smart picked it up. I seen him.”

“But you see,” said the doctor, “you haven’t broken it at the joint. I must amputate the finger at the second joint.”

Jake nodded again.

“I’m sorry,” said the marm, in spite of the doctor.

“Don’t you talk,” said Jake. “Jest jab away!”

The marm held her tongue and the doctor jabbed away.

Jake’s snapping eyes went quite behind a cloud, and Jake’s twisted mouth turned very white. But Jake never winced nor cried out.

“I’m glad it is the left hand,” said I, as I took the last stitch in the last bandage.

“So be I,” said Jake.

“It was a fortunate chance,” said I.

But Jake said nothing.

“And I wonder that you did not lose the arm,” I said, another day, when I was dressing the mangled finger.

But Jake said nothing.

And another day, cheerily, “Never mind, Jake! Very likely you will do twice as much with three fingers as you would with four.”

But Jake said nothing at all.

One day Bob, the confidential, met and stopped me just starting to see my diphtheria patients in the new parish.<sup>3</sup>

“Boy—on—behind!” shouted Bob, with an air of communicating a great secret, hidden from the world at large, but especially revealed to his personal and unerring insight. “Boy—on—be-*hi-i-ind!*”

Sure enough. There was a boy on behind—not a very unusual sight, I must admit, on marm, the doctor’s buggy—a boy with a mouth like a cable-rope, and eyes like stars on a cloudy night, and three fingers on the left hand.

“Dear me, Jake!” said I, for I had not seen Jake for some weeks. “Hand all right?”

“All right,” said Jake.

“Quite healed?”

“Yes, marm,” said Jake.

“Where are you going?”

“Nowheres partikerlar.”

“What did you want on behind my buggy?”

“Not much, partikerlar.”

“Anything to say to me?”

“Nothing partikerlar.”

“Suppose you jump in and ride to the new parish, and say it, then?”

Jake supposed.

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<sup>3</sup> Phelps subtly connects homeopathy to her narrator; in the late 1800s, diphtheria patients were eight times more likely to die from regular medical practice than they were from homeopathy according to *The Cambridge World History of Human Disease* (3).

“I’m kinder muddy.”

“So am I.”

Jake jumped in.

I touched up Dolly, for I was already late about my morning’s calls, and Jake and I flew fast over the freckled face of the still, new parish woods. For some time we rode quite silently. Jake ran the hand with the little grimy stump through the arm-rest on the side of the buggy, and drew clouds enough over his eyes to have blown up a shower. To be sure, Jake never ran on behind my buggy without his reasons; but, to be sure, there should be no fuss made about Jake. If he had anything “partikelar” to say, he should say it. It was his turn to “jab away.”

“See here,” said Jake, just as the diphtheria houses struck into sight, “see here, you see.”

“Yes,” I said, I saw. “What was it?”

“Mar’s goin’ to send me to school, you see.”

“When?”

“Tomorrow.”

“For how long?”

“Three months.”

“That’s very nice,” said I.

“Yes,” said Jake, “that’s very nice.”

“I thought,” said Jake, after a moment’s pause, “you’d like to know it.”

Now that, I think, was one of the advantages of being both a doctor and a “marm.” Of course I was glad to know it, very glad; but not so glad as Jake himself, by any means.

“No,” said Jake, gravely, like a grown man, “no, not so glad as I be.”

“You think more of going to school than most boys, I suspect, Jake?”

Jake must have thought more of something than most boys. He sat up straight in the carriage, and began to tremble.

“See here. It’s jest like this. Now see here. It seems to me as ef I didn’t get an eddication, I should—should be sech a fool!” said poor Jake. “It seems to me as ef I must have an eddication, *any way*. They wouldn’t send me.” Jake broke off, abruptly. “Mar’s got scairt, now. I’m goin’ for three months. I thought ye’d like to know it.”

But Jake’s little grimy, mangled hand trembled in the rest; he turned such a twisted face up to me that I could not untie a strand of it. It was all a knot. So I sat and looked at Jake, and Jake sat and looked at me.

“I’ve ben to work sence I was ’most eight year old,” said Jake.

“Poor little fellow!”

“An’ I alwers begged to go to school, and mar never sent me sence. I’m twelve years old next month, marm.”

“Poor little fellow!”

“I won’t *be* a poor little fellow!” The clouds in the little factory boy’s eyes broke suddenly, and the stars of a kind of manhood which we do not see every day, in factories or out, came out and shone all over his twisted face. “I won’t be a poor little fellow all my life! See if I do!”

“I’m sure you won’t,” said I.

“Well, then,” said Jake, “I’ll get out now and walk home.”

But he stopped, half over the wheel.

“Three months is a great deal, don’t you think it is?”

“A great deal,” said I.

## One Way To Get an Education

Jake jumped over the wheel.

“Mebbe they’ll give me the year out. Shouldn’t you think they might?”

“I should think they might, indeed,” said I.

Jake stood still and washed his feet in a little mud-puddle, while I got out and tied Dolly to the first diphtheria post.

“See here,” said Jake, again.

I think that was the first time that I really had seen.

Jake looked up. In an instant I knew that I had cut the knot of the little twisted face. Jake looked up, and Jake trembled so that he could scarcely stand in the mud-puddle.

“I did it—marm—I did it a puppuss!”

“O, Jake!”

“I thought they’d let me out. I did it—O, I did!—*I did it a puppuss*. I put my finger in. *I meant to*. Look here! Don’t you tell. I THOUGHT YOU’D LIKE TO KNOW.”

Of course it was a dreadful thing to do! And of course neither Jake nor I would want another boy to do it! But of course—or at least I thought so—it was too much of a story to be thrown away.



## THE GIRL WHO COULD NOT WRITE A COMPOSITION

### Part I.

“Try again, Jemima,” said the principal, patiently.

The principal spoke so *very* patiently, that Jemima did not feel at all encouraged to try again. If she had spoken pleasantly or hopefully or cheerfully or sadly or even angrily, it would have been more inspiring. But so very, very patiently!

Jemima sighed.

“I’ve tried again so many times!” she said. And this was true. So many times that the principal had whispered to the first assistant, and the first assistant had whispered to the second assistant, and the Latin department suspected, and the girls themselves had begun to understand, that Jem Jasper could not write a composition.

Poor little Jem! Only sixteen years old, and a thousand miles away from her father, as homesick as a lost canary, stranded for a year in this awful Massachusetts boarding-school, where the Juniors studied Greek and the Seniors talked of applying at Amherst,—and could n’t write a composition!

Jem was not exactly a dunce either. She stood very well in algebra, and really enjoyed her natural philosophy. At book-keeping she did no worse, perhaps a little better, than most girls. In the gymnasium she had taken a prize. She had a sunny little freckled face, too, with red hair that she was n’t ashamed of, and red cheeks that she could n’t have been ashamed of if she had tried; and people liked her, in a way. Her teachers were slow to scold her, and the girls were not apt to laugh at her. But not to be able to write a composition in a school where the Seniors talked of applying at Amherst!

The lecturer on style bore with her for one term. Then he handed her and her compositions over to the principal. The principal had been patient with her for another term. Now she had grown so *very* patient that she sat perplexed.

“I don’t know what to do with you,” she slowly said.

“I wish you would n’t do anything with me,” said Jem, doggedly.

The principal frowned a little, thinking this was impertinent in Jem; then she smiled a little, and concluded that it was only stupid.

“Father’ll think I’m a fool,” said Jem. “And I don’t think I am, do you?”

The principal smiled and hesitated.

“I don’t *feel* like a fool,” continued Jem, candidly.

“Not even when you’re told to write a composition?” smiled the principal.

“No,” said Jem, boldly. “I don’t feel like a fool when I’m asked to write a composition. I feel as if I were in prison, and going to be hung.”

The principal shook her patient head, and only smiled the more.

One day a learned lady called on the principal. She was the editor of the Wednesday Evening Early Visitor, and a very learned lady indeed.

“What *shall* I do with that girl?” asked the principal.

“Turn her over to me,” said the learned lady.

“You can’t get a composition out of her that is fit to be read.”

“We’ll see.”

“But it’s impossible. Look these over and judge for yourself.”

## The Girl Who Could Not Write a Composition

The principal threw down on her desk a package of poor little Jem's compositions, and the editor of the Wednesday Evening Early Visitor pitilessly read them, every one.

This happened so long ago that I have only been able to procure a few.

They ran like this:—

### THE GREEKS.

The Greeks were a very warlike people. Socrates was a Greek, and so was Homer. The Peloponnesian War was long and bloody, and is one to be remembered, when time shall be no more.

*(A large blot.)*

### QUEEN ELIZABETH.

Queen Elizabeth died in 1603. Macaulay says, "In 1603 the great Queen died." That is a great deal better way to say it, I know. She wore a ruff, and killed somebody. I think it was Leicester. I cannot think of anything else to say about her.<sup>1</sup>

*(Many tears.)*

### MIRTHFULNESS.

Mirthfulness is one of the most remarkable traits of the human heart.

*(An abrupt stop.)*

"Nevertheless," said the learned lady, less confidently, "I'll try her."

The learned lady tried her, in awful earnest. Jem had never been so tried before. Classical Dictionaries, and English Grammars, Russell's Speakers, and Parker's Outlines, Somebody's Elements (but what they were elements of, poor Jem has never discovered to this day), and Somebody Else's Young Author piled in bulwarks on Jem's study-table. Patiently, aspiringly, bitterly, tearfully, despairingly, Jem attacked them. The lady chose her "subjects." She chose her own subjects. "Outlines" and "plans" and "skeletons," and "suggestions" were given to her. She made outlines and plans and skeletons and suggestions of her own. She wrote poetry. She tried blank verse, and the metres of Horace. She wrote upon the beauties of nature, and the price of coal. She tried her hand at romance and essays. She effected "abstracts" of sermons, and "abridgments" of history, and "topics" of all varieties. The Editor of Wednesday Evening Early Visitor was very faithful with her,—very.

But one day Jem brought her a composition on Icarus. Poor Jem had cried all night, and studied all day, upset three ink-bottles, and spoiled one dress; the bulwark of dictionaries and elements danced before her dizzy eyes in a hopeless mass of horror, —and this was the composition on Icarus.

### ICARUS.

Icarus was the son of Dædalus. They fled from Minos. Icarus made wings of wax, which melted. He fell into the Midsummer Night's Dream, and the lovely and accomplished Una carried him and her father Anchises upon her shoulders, through the siege of Troy.

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<sup>1</sup> Queen Elizabeth I reigned over England and Ireland from 1558 until her death in 1603. Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester, was a suitor to Elizabeth. However, it seems that the reference may be to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Essex, as Elizabeth had him beheaded in February 1601.

The Editor of the Wednesday Evening Early Visitor read this, and there was a pause.

“I think,” said the Editor of the Wednesday Evening Early Visitor, then, “that we will not meet again next week. I think—that it may be as well,—Miss Jasper, for you to surrender the effort to master the art of composition.”

Poor little Miss Jasper “surrendered” heartily. The principal, not at all patiently, informed her that she was grieved to feel, but feel she did, that it would not be best for her to pursue her studies in the seminary beyond the close of the term,—that perhaps a retired Western life would be more calculated to improve her mind,—and that she had written to her father to that effect. At *that*, Jem’s heart broke.

“What is your father?” asked some sympathetic girls in a little crowd about her.

“Furniture,” sobbed Jem. “And poor, almost—and I’ve cost him so much—and there’s a boy yet to come after me—and it seems as if I could n’t bo—bear it to go home a fu—fool!”

Jem did not wait for the end of the term, so they tell me, nor for the departure of the letter. She burned her compositions, tipped over the bulwark of elements, packed her trunks, and went home. Her father was making a coffin, when she walked, dusty and wretched from her long journey, into the shop.

“What did you come home for?” said he.

“Because I’m a dunce,” said she.

“Have you told your mother?” said he.

“Yes,” said she.

“What did she say?” asked the furniture-dealer, after a silence.

“It’s no matter, sir, if you please,” said the poor little dunce, after another. For her mother was a sickly woman, not a very happy one, and sometimes—to tell the truth—a cross one. She was mortified and surprised, and Jem was mortified and tired, and whatever welcome home she had had in the house, I suspect she found that in the store an improvement.

“Well, well,” said her father, taking up his hammer again. “Never mind. Just run and get me those nails on the low shelf, will you? and never mind!”

But he said to himself, “So my poor little girl is stupid, is she? I’ll see if I can’t make one place for her where she’ll forget it.”

So it happened that Jem, after she left off writing compositions, used to run in and out of the shop so much. In consequence, two things came about. She did indeed very nearly forget the composition on Icarus. And there will be another chapterful of her.

## Part II.

“Jem has sent to Chicago for a declining-chair!”

“What?”

“A declining-chair. I heard her. Yes, I did. *You* bet. Jem has sent to Chicago for a declining-chair.”

Poppet climbed to the top of the Magee stove (the fire happened fortunately to be low), and sat there triumphant. Poppet’s mother was resting on the mending-basket, and she sat *there*, amazed.

If Jem had been a boy, she might have stripped the city of Chicago of its stock of “declining-chairs,” and neither Poppet nor his mother, nor the world at large, would have given a second thought to it. But she was n’t. And Poppet and his mother and the world at large have

## The Girl Who Could Not Write a Composition

given several thoughts to it before now. Indeed, they have given so many thoughts to it that Jem has got into the newspapers. But that is no reason why she should not get into the “Young Folks” do not, I think I may venture to affirm, always read the newspapers; and in the next place I have collected some particulars about Jem with which neither the newspapers nor the “Young Folks” are acquainted.<sup>2</sup>

It was about an hour before Poppet came home to his mother that Jem had taken the sign down, and locked herself into the store to cry over it. She laid the heavy board across a barrel, and tearfully drew her fingers through the gilt shade of the massive letters till their shine went out before her blinded eyes and

H. J A S P E R.  
*Furniture Warerooms.*

went into sudden mourning as deep as her own bombazine dress.

She had taken the sign down in a fit of impatient grief almost like vexation. It seemed to her as if there were a kind of positive personal wickedness in that sign. To hold up its bare face to the world just the same as ever, and persist that H. Jasper kept Furniture Warerooms, when—O poor father! poor father! And there the bold-faced sign was drenched and forgiven in a flood of tears.

It was just a week that morning since he died. The funeral was over, the muddy ground was stamped over the last piece of furniture that H. Jasper would ever own, the house was swept, the sick-room aired and dreadfully fresh. Relations in light mourning had gone to their own happy homes, her mother had taken to the mending-basket and untold accumulated stockings, and Poppet had played his first game of marbles—half frightened to death, too, because he laughed in the course of it—with an Irish boy in the street.

Nobody but Jem had come to the store. Nobody, not even Jem, knew what was to become of the store. Nobody, least of all Jem, knew what was to become of herself.

“What becomes of me becomes of us all,” she said to herself,—and she said it, I must own, at the funeral. “*I’m father now.*”

It did not seem to her that she had had any time to cry till she locked herself in with that sign; the funeral, and the relations in light mourning, and Poppet, and her mother had kept her so busy. So for a little while she sat and cried on the sign.

Nobody but Jem knew what comfort she and her father had taken in the shop behind that false persisting sign. How she had run on the errands, and held the nails, and tacked the bindings, and chosen the chintz, and measured the mouldings, and sawed the legs, and even helped to cover the lounges. How he had made fun of her and said, “What ought to let a J. into the old shingle, Jem,—‘H. & J.’ Or Jasper and Daughter—eh?” How he had told her that she knew how to strike a nail, and had an eye for a foot-rule, and hung a curtain as well as he did;

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<sup>2</sup> Phelps seems to be punning here on the children’s magazine, *Our Young Folks*, that published this story but would not publish her companion pieces “Unhappy Girls” (*The Independent* 27 July 1871) and “A Talk to the Girls” (*The Independent* 4 January 1872). In those essays, she insists that young women be educated and trained to undertake nontraditional and more profitable employment.

and he hoped that Poppet, when he got through college, would be half as smart. How the mention of college reminded her faintly of Icarus, but very faintly, and she was sure that it did not remind him, and that made her very happy. What a help she had been to him, and how pleasant life had been! How suddenly and awfully help and pleasure stopped that day a week ago! How drearily and darkly her two happy years came down with the old sign!

Ah, well! Ah, well! Jem wiped up the sign and her eyes together. This would never do. She had cried ten minutes by the clock, and she could spare the time to cry no longer. Something must be done. H. Jasper had left no will, his furniture, an ailing wife, Poppet, and a daughter eighteen years old who could not write a composition.

“What *will* they do?” said all the relations in light mourning, after they had got home. “If Jemima had only been a boy!”

“What *shall* I do?” repeated Jem, dabbing the sign quite dry. “If I had only been a boy!”

“Let—Jem—look after—the stock.” Although she was n’t a boy, the last thing that her father had faintly said was this. It had seemed very unnatural to the relations in light mourning. There was an uncle who expected to be executor, and a first cousin who talked of buying out himself. But it had seemed so natural to Jem that she had not even offered the store key to the uncle, and whatever appropriate masculine disturbance of the “estate” the law might require by and by, nobody was ready just now to trouble little Jem, wishing that she were a boy, in the old store, over the old sign.

Somebody did trouble her, however. It was a customer, at the locked door.

“Come in,” said Jem.

“I would if I could,” said the customer through the key-hole.

“O, I forgot,” said Jem, jumping, and let him in.

“Where’s your father?” said the customer. He was a loud man, just in from the prairies somewhere, and “has not heard,” thought Jem.

She thought it aloud in her confusion, and the loud man, in his confusion, sat down on one end of the sign, and brought the other end and the truth together against his head at once.

“You don’t say! Beg pardon. What did he die of? So you’re runnin’ the business? Well, I’ve come to get a reclining-chair for my wife. One of these big ones, you know, that tip back into last week. Expensive, I s’pose, but you see she’s got bad in her back, and nothin’ ’ll do for her but one of them chairs. Thought I’d step in this mornin’ and prize one. Up stairs? I’ll go right along up. Beg pardon I’m sure! What did you say he died of?”

Jem did not say. In fact she did not say anything. Something in the loud man’s long speech had set her thinking suddenly and sharply. She followed him quite up stairs in silence before she remembered to tell him that they had not a reclining-chair in the store, but one shop-worn sample. By that time she had thought hard. “Runnin’ the business herself, was she?” Why! For a moment she lost her breath. The next, before she knew it, she had said to the loud man, “I can get you such a chair as you want, sir, in three days. We have to send to Chicago for them, and I can’t promise it before that; but I can meet your order in three days,”—had said it, and could n’t help it now.

“Prompt?” said the loud man.

“Yes, sir.”

“I want a plenty of springs, mind, and good horse-hair stuffing, and a latch that won’t get out of order.”

“Yes, sir.” Jem took down the orders in her note-book, fast.

“And some kind of a green cover,—like this.”

## The Girl Who Could Not Write a Composition

“You want rep, sir. Blue-green? or yellow?”

“I’ll leave that to you, I guess,” said the customer, hesitating. “Yellow” went into the note-book.

“You’ll get me a first-class chair, will you?—in three days, prompt?”

“I certainly will,” said Jem.

“What will you charge me?”

“Forty dollars.”

“Whe—ew! You mean to make something out of me, if you *be* a girl! That’s too much.”

“That’s the price of your order, sir,” said Jem, firmly, looking as much like business as a little red-haired, red-cheeked, freckled girl, with tears on her face, could possibly look. “I can give you a smaller size, with inferior stuffing, for thirty.”

“My wife’s pretty considerable size herself,” mused the customer. “She might break through on thirty, might n’t she now?”

“I’m afraid she might,” said Jem, demurely.

“I’ll go forty on it, I guess, and do the thing ship-shape,” concluded the customer.

The first thing that Jem did, when the customer had gone, was to go straight out and hang up the sign again; and as she stood on the ladder in the sun the gilt of the mourning letters revived, and winked at her shrewdly, with a certain relieved comfortable air, too, such as people have been known to wear in a change from crape to lilac on a fine Easter Sunday. Jem could not help laughing in spite of herself,—then wished her father could see it,—and so cried again.

However, she did not cry too hard to prevent her going to the express office at once with the order for her reclining-chair; and by the time that she had done this, and got home, her eyes were quite dry, and very bright. She walked right into the sitting-room, and said, “I am going to carry on the business myself.”

“Jemima Jasper!—”

“I am going to carry on the business myself,” repeated Jemima Jasper. Her mother fell through the mending-basket, and Poppet tipped over the stove. It seemed to Jem as if, with that single and simple remark of hers, all the ordinary world fell through and tipped over. The relations in light mourning expostulated. Everybody expostulated. People wrote, called, called again, sent messages, were shocked, were sure it would n’t do, entreated, threatened, argued, urged,—made as much commotion over that one poor little girl’s sending to Chicago for that “declining-chair,” as if she had proclaimed war against the Czar of Russia on her own responsibility and resources.

They said, “Why did n’t she let her uncle sell out the stock for her?”

“Why did n’t she take in plain sewing?”

“Or she could teach a few little children at home.”

“It would be so much more suitable!”

“Yes, and womanly and lady-like, and all that.”

“She would never make a cent, you know.”

“Mrs. Jasper shouldn’t indulge that girl so.”

And to crown all, “What a pity she could n’t wait till Poppet was large enough to support her!”

But Jem showed a firm little freckled face to everybody, and stoutly said, “I understand the furniture business. I don’t understand anything else. I am just as well able to support the family as if I were n’t a girl, and I mean to do it. It would please father, and it pleases me. Just let me alone and see.”

\* \* \* \* \*

A story is a story, however large. And this is the rest of it; and no more wonderful, after all, than truth is apt to be.

One day, some years after those five stars overhead, the editor of the Wednesday Evening Early Visitor, travelling at the West with her friend the principal, stepped into a furniture store in a brisk little town in Illinois, to buy a bracket.

The ladies were waited upon by rather a small boy, who stood behind the counter with a ceremonious and important air. He looked so small, so ceremonious, and so important, that the ladies hesitated, and asked, “Can we see one of the firm?”

“The firm is busy in the counting-room just now,” said the boy, grandly. “She has let the clerk off on a holiday, and I tend after school to-day. What would you like, ma’am?”

“Poppet,” said a bright, busy voice at this moment, “just run over to the freight depot and tell Carter to hurry up those lounges. Be as quick as you can. I will wait on the ladies.”

With that, Poppet jumped over the counter, and “the firm” walked leisurely round behind it. She was a dignified young lady, with freckles and red hair. She seemed to be very busy, and brought out her pretty stock of brackets without any more than the busiest glance at her customers’ faces. But her customers gave many sharp glances at hers.

“Something so familiar to me about that young lady!” mused the editor of the Early Visitor in an aside whisper. At the door, with her bracket under her arm, she turned and looked back,—but confusedly; in the street she stopped to examine the sign. It was a handsome new sign, and read

<p>H. &amp; J. J A S P E R. <i>Furniture.</i></p>
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“Jasper—Jasper,” said the editor, thoughtfully. “Do you remember that stupid little Miss Jasper you used to have at school? That young lady reminds me of her amazingly. I wonder if it can be—I mean to ask at the hotel.”

“Jemima Jasper—yes,” said the clerk of the hotel, “that’s the name. Smart girl too. *Very* smart girl. Carried on her father’s business after he died. Keeps the old gentleman’s name on along with hers, too,—did you notice? Curious thing! Yes, that’s a smart girl.”

Did she support the family and educate that boy? the editor would like to know. The clerk laughed a saucy clerk’s laugh.

“Shouldn’t wonder if she did! Madam, folks say that girl is worth fifty thousand dollars if she’s worth a cent!”

Miss Jasper came out of the counting-room to watch the customers with the bracket walk up the street. She, too, looked confused. It seemed to her as if Icarus had been in the store. She felt suddenly very inky and stupid. The brackets on the counter turned mistily into a bulwark of “Elements,” and the two ladies in the street had a hazy air as if they had fallen into the Midsummer Night’s Dream.

When they turned to look back at the sign, the furniture dealer suddenly smiled. She would have enjoyed calling them back,—would have enjoyed it very much.

But Poppet and Carter were in sight with the lounges, and business was business, and could not wait,—no, not even for the editor of the Wednesday Evening Early Visitor.

MARY ELIZABETH  
(HER TRUE TEMPERANCE STORY)

Mary Elizabeth was a little girl with a long name. She was poor, she was sick, she was ragged, she was dirty, she was cold, she was hungry, she was frightened. She had no home, she had no mother, she had no father, she had no sister, she had no grandmother, and no kitten. She had no supper, she had had no dinner, she had had no breakfast. She had no shoes, she had no hood, she had no mittens, she had no flannels. She had no place to go, and nobody to care whether she went or not. In fact, Mary Elizabeth had not much of anything but a short pink calico dress, a little red cotton-and-wool shawl, and her long name. Besides this, she had a pair of old rubbers, too large for her. They flopped on the pavement as she walked.

She was walking up Washington street in Boston. It was late in the afternoon of a bitter January day. Already the lamplighters were coming with their long poles, and gas-lights began to flash upon the grayness—neither day nor night—through which the child watched the people moving dimly, with a wonder in her heart. This wonder was as confused as the half-light in which the crowd hurried by.

“God made so many people,” thought Mary Elizabeth, “he must have made so many suppers. Seems as if there’d ought to been one for one extra little girl.”

But she thought this in a gentle way: very gently for a girl who had no shoes, no flannels, no hood, no home, no mother, no dinner, no bed, no supper. She was a very gentle little girl. All girls who had n’t anything were not like Mary Elizabeth. She roomed with a girl out toward Charlestown who was different. That girl’s name was Jo. They slept in a box that an Irish woman let them have in an old shed. The shed was too cold for her cow, and she couldn’t use it; so she told Jo and Mary Elizabeth that they might have it as well as not. Mary Elizabeth thought her very kind. There was this difference between Jo and Mary Elizabeth: when Jo was hungry, she stole; when Mary Elizabeth was hungry, she begged.

On the night of which I speak, she begged hard. It is very wrong to beg, we all know. It is wrong to give to beggars, we all know, too; we have been told so a great many times. Still, if I had been as hungry as Mary Elizabeth, I presume I should have begged, too. Whether I should have given her anything if I had been on Washington street that January night, how can I tell?

At any rate, nobody did. Some told her to go to the Orphans’ Home.<sup>1</sup> Some said: “Ask the police.” Some people shook their heads, and more people did nothing at all. One lady told her to go to the St. Priscilla and Aquila Society, and Mary Elizabeth said: “Thank you, ma’am,” politely.<sup>2</sup> She had never heard of Aquila and Priscilla. She thought they must be policemen. Another lady bade her go to an Office and be Registered, and Mary Elizabeth said: “*Ma’am?*”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Phelps refers to the New England Home for Little Wanderers, which was founded in Boston in 1865 and has been in operation under various agencies since then.

<sup>2</sup>Priscilla and Aquila were Hebrews contemporary to Paul. They emigrated to Corinth when Claudius forced all Jews to leave Rome, and worked with Paul to found the Christian church. There is no record of a children’s aid society in their names.

<sup>3</sup>Phelps refers to the Boston Children’s Aid Society, which was founded in 1861 and later absorbed into the Boston Children’s Aid Association and is now part of Boston Children’s Services.



So now she was shuffling up Washington street,—I might say flopping up Washington street,—in the old rubbers, and the pink dress and red shawl, not knowing exactly what to do next; peeping into people’s faces, timidly looking away from them; hesitating; heart-sick,—for a very little girl can be very heart-sick,—colder, she thought, every minute, and hungrier each hour than she was the hour before. Poor Mary Elizabeth!

Poor Mary Elizabeth left Washington street at last, where everybody had homes and suppers without one extra one to spare for a little girl, and turned into a short, bright, showy street, where stood a great hotel. Everybody in Boston knows, and a great many people out of Boston know, that hotel; in fact, they know it so well that I will not mention the name of it, because it was against the rules of the house for beggars to be admitted, and perhaps the proprietor would not like it if I told how this one especial little beggar got into his well-conducted house. Indeed, precisely how she got in nobody knows. Whether the door-keeper was away, or busy, or sick, or careless, or whether the head-waiter at the dining-room door was so tall that he could n’t see so short a beggar, or whether the clerk at the desk was so noisy that he could n’t hear so still a beggar, or however it was, Mary Elizabeth did get in,—by the door-keeper, past the head-waiter under the shadow of the clerk,—over the smooth, slippery marble floor. The child crept on. She came to the office door, and stood still. She looked around her with wide eyes. She had never seen a place like that. Lights flashed over it, many and bright. Gentlemen sat in it smoking and reading. They were all warm. Not one of them looked as if he had had no dinner, and no breakfast, and no supper.

“How many extra suppers,” thought the little girl, “it must ha’ taken to feed ’em all.” She pronounced it “extry.” “How many extry suppers! I guess may be there’ll be one for me in here.”

There was a little noise, a very little one, strange to the warm, bright, well-ordered room. It was not the rattling of the “Boston Advertiser,” or the “Transcript,” or the “Post”; it was not the slight rap-rapping of a cigar stump, as the ashes fell from some one’s white hands; nobody coughed, and nobody swore. It was a different sound. It was the sound of an old rubber, much too large, flopping on the marble floor. Several gentlemen glanced at their own well-shod and well-brushed feet, then up and around the room.

Mary Elizabeth stood in the middle of it, in her pink calico dress and red-plaid shawl. The shawl was tied over her head, and about her neck with a ragged tippet. She looked very funny and round behind, like the wooden women in the Noah’s Ark. Her bare feet showed in the old rubbers. She began to shuffle about the room, holding out one purple little hand.

One or two of the gentlemen laughed; some frowned; more did nothing at all; most did not notice, or did not seem to notice, the child. One said:

“What’s the matter, here?”

Mary Elizabeth flopped on. She went from one to another, less timidly; a kind of desperation had taken possession of her. The odors from the dining-room came in, of strong, hot coffee, and strange, roast meats. Mary Elizabeth thought of Jo. It seemed to her she was so hungry that, if she could not get a supper, she should jump up and run, and rush about, and snatch something, and steal, like Jo. She held out her hand, but only said:

“I’m hungry!”

A gentleman called her. He was the gentleman who had asked, “What’s the matter, here?” He called her in behind his “New York Times,” which was big enough to hide three of Mary Elizabeth, and when he saw that nobody was looking, he gave her a five-cent piece, in a hurry, as if he had done a sin, and quickly said:

## Mary Elizabeth

“There, there, child! go, now, go!”

Then he began to read the “Times” quite hard and fast and to look severe, as one does who never gives anything to beggars, as a matter of principle.

But nobody else gave anything to Mary Elizabeth. She shuffled from one to another, hopelessly. Every gentleman shook his head. One called for a waiter to put her out. This frightened her, and she stood still.

Over by a window, in a lonely corner of the great room, a young man was sitting, apart from the others. Mary Elizabeth had seen that young man when she first came in, but he had not seen her. He had not seen anything nor anybody. He sat with his elbows on the table, and his face buried in his arms. He was a well-dressed young man, with brown, curling hair. Mary Elizabeth wondered why he looked so miserable, and why he sat alone. She thought, perhaps, if he were n’t so happy as the other gentlemen, he would be more sorry for cold and hungry girls. She hesitated, then flopped along, and directly up to him.

One or two gentlemen laid down their papers and watched this; they smiled and nodded at each other. The child did not see them, to wonder why. She went up, and put her hand upon the young man’s arm.

He started. The brown, curly head lifted itself from the shelter of his arms; a young face looked sharply at the beggar-girl,—a beautiful young face it might have been. It was haggard now, and dreadful to look at,—bloated, and badly marked with the unmistakable marks of a wicked week’s debauch. He roughly said:—

“What do you want?”

“I’m hungry,” said Mary Elizabeth.

“I can’t help that. Go away.”

“I have n’t had anything to eat for a whole day—a *whole day!*” repeated the child.

Her lip quivered. But she spoke distinctly. Her voice sounded through the room. One gentleman after another had laid down his paper or his pipe. Several were watching this little scene.

“Go away!” repeated the young man, irritably. “Don’t bother me. *I* haven’t had anything to eat for *three* days!”

His face went down into his arms again. Mary Elizabeth stood staring at the brown, curling hair. She stood perfectly still for some moments. She evidently was greatly puzzled. She walked away a little distance, then stopped, and thought it over.

And now, paper after paper, and pipe after cigar went down. Every gentleman in the room began to look on. The young man, with the beautiful brown curls, and dissipated, disgraced, and hidden face, was not stiller than the rest. The little figure in the pink calico, and the red shawl, and big rubbers stood for a moment silent among them all. The waiter came to take her out, but the gentlemen motioned him away.

Mary Elizabeth turned her five-cent piece over and over slowly in her purple hand. Her hand shook. The tears came. The smell of the dinner from the dining-room grew savory and strong. The child put the piece of money to her lips as if she could have eaten it, then turned, and, without further hesitation, went back. She touched the young man—on the bright curls, this time—with her trembling little hand.

The room was so still now, that what she said rang out to the corridor, where the waiters stood, with the clerk behind looking over the desk to see.

“I’m sorry you are so hungry. If you have n’t had anything for three days, you must be hungrier than me. I’ve got five cents. A gentleman gave it to me. I wish you would take it. I’ve

only gone *one* day. You can get some supper with it, and—maybe—I—can get some, somewheres! I wish you’d please to take it!”

Mary Elizabeth stood quite still, holding out her five-cent piece. She did not understand the sound and the stir that went all over the bright room. She did not see that some of the gentlemen coughed and wiped their spectacles. She did not know why the brown curls before her came up with such a start, nor why the young man’s wasted face flushed red and hot with noble shame.

She did not in the least understand why he flung the five-cent piece upon the table, and snatching her in his arms held her fast, and hid his face on her plaid shawl and sobbed. Nor did she know what could be the reason that nobody seemed amused to see this gentleman cry; but that the gentleman who had given her the money came up, and some more came up, and they gathered round, and she in the midst of them, and they all spoke kindly, and the young man with the bad face that might have been so beautiful, stood up, still clinging to her, and said aloud:

“She’s shamed me before you all, and she’s shamed me to myself! I’ll learn a lesson from this beggar, so help me God!”

So then, he took the child upon his knee, and the gentlemen came up to listen, and the young man asked her what was her name.

“Mary Elizabeth, sir.”

“Names used to mean things—in the Bible—when I was as little as you. I read the Bible then. Does Mary Elizabeth mean Angel of Rebuke?”<sup>4</sup>

“*Sir?*”

“Where do you live, Mary Elizabeth?”

“Nowhere, sir.”

“Where do you sleep?”

“In Mrs. O’Flynn’s shed, sir. It’s too cold for the cows. She’s so kind, she lets us stay.”

“Whom do you stay with?”

“Nobody, only Jo.”

“Is Jo your brother?”

“No, sir. Jo is a girl. I have n’t got only Jo.”

“What does Jo do for a living?”

“She—gets it, sir.”<sup>5</sup>

“And what do you do?”

“I beg. It’s better than to—get it, sir, I think.”

“Where’s your mother?”

“Dead.”

“What did she die of?”

“Drink, sir,” said Mary Elizabeth, in her distinct and gentle tone.

“Ah,—well. And your father?”

“He is dead. He died in prison.”

“What sent him to prison?”

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<sup>4</sup>There are no such angels in the Bible, but George MacDonald’s Miss Horn rises up like an “angle of rebuke” in Chapter 67 of his novel *Malcolm*, serialized in *Lippincott’s Magazine of Popular Literature and Science* 15 (Jan. 1875): 76.

<sup>5</sup>Jo likely “gets” her living through prostitution, a trade easier to ply in the period than thievery.

## Mary Elizabeth

“Drink, sir.”

“Oh!”

“I had a brother once,” continued Mary Elizabeth, who grew quite eloquent with so large an audience, “but he died, too.”

“What did he die of?”

“Drink, sir,” said the child cheerfully. “I *do* want my supper,” she added, after a pause, speaking in a whisper, as if to Jo or to herself, “and Jo ’ll be wondering for me.”

“Wait, then,” said the young man; “I’ll see if *I* can’t beg enough to get you your supper.”

“I *thought* there must be an extry one among so many folks!” cried Mary Elizabeth; for now, she thought, she should get back her five cents.

Sure enough; the young man put the five cents into his hat, to begin with. Then he took out his purse, and put in something that made less noise than the five-cent piece, and something more, and more and more. Then he passed around the great room, walking still unsteadily, and the gentleman who gave the five cents and all the gentlemen put something into the young man’s hat.

So when he came back to the table, he emptied the hat and counted the money, and truly, it was forty dollars.

“*Forty dollars!*”

Mary Elizabeth looked frightened. She did not understand.

“It’s yours,” said the young man. “Now, come to supper. But see! this gentleman who gave you the five-cent piece shall take care of the money for you. You can trust *him*. He’s got a wife, too. But we’ll come to supper, now.”

“Yes, yes,” said the gentleman, coming up. “She knows all about every orphan in this city, I believe. *She’ll* know what ought to be done with you. *She’ll* take care of you.”

“But Jo will wonder,” said Mary Elizabeth, loyally. “I can’t leave Jo. And I must go back and thank Mrs. O’Flynn for the shed.”

“Oh, yes, yes; we’ll fix all that,” said the gentleman, “and Jo, too. A little girl with forty dollars need n’t sleep in a cow-shed. But don’t you want your supper?”

“Why, yes,” said Mary Elizabeth; “I do.”

So the young man took her by the hand, and the gentleman whose wife knew all about what to do with orphans took her by the other hand, and one or two more gentlemen followed, and they all went out into the dining-room, and put Mary Elizabeth in a chair at a marble table, and asked her what she wanted for supper.

Mary Elizabeth said that a little dry toast and a cup of milk would do nicely. So all the gentlemen laughed. And she wondered why.

And the young man with the brown curls laughed, too, and began to look quite happy. But he ordered chicken, and cranberry sauce, and mashed potatoes, and celery, and rolls, and butter, and tomatoes, and an ice cream, and a cup of tea, and nuts, and raisins, and cake, and custard, and apples, and grapes, and Mary Elizabeth sat in her pink dress and red shawl, and ate the whole; and why it did n’t kill her nobody knows; but it did n’t.

The young man with the face that might have been beautiful,—that might yet be, one would have thought, who had seen him then,—stood watching the little girl.

“She’s preached me a better sermon,” he said, below his breath; “better than all the ministers I ever heard in all the churches. May God bless her! I wish there were a thousand like her in this selfish world!”

And when I heard about it, I wished so, too.

“A story is a story, however large”: Writing for Children

And this is the end of Mary Elizabeth’s true Temperance Story.

## CHAPTER TWO

“A FACT WHICH I THINK MR. TENNYSON HAS OMITTED”:  
WRITING UNDER THE INFLUENCE

The Lady of Shalott  
The Christmas of Sir Galahad  
The True Story of Guenever

## INTRODUCTION

In 1832, British Poet Laureate Alfred, Lord Tennyson published his ballad “The Lady of Shalott,” the narrative of the Lady Elaine who died for a curse and a glance at Sir Lancelot. Over a period of fifty years, from 1833 to 1888, Tennyson published his epic poem *Idylls of the King*. Its twelve books tell the stories of Arthur and his knights and ladies of the court. This work, combined with the rest of his prodigious output, made Tennyson the most popular poet of the age. His work “occupied significant space on the bookshelves of almost every family of readers in England and the United States” (Christ 1109). Tennyson’s influence was equally pervasive. The artists and writers comprising the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood turned to his work and the work that influenced Tennyson—Sir Thomas Malory’s *Morte D’arthur* (1470)—to create scenes of tragic ladies in paint and verse. In short, Victorian England and America were steadily exposed to these stories.

Elizabeth Stuart Phelps felt this influence deeply and drew on Tennyson’s portrayals of Arthur and Guenever, the Lady of Shalott and her longed-for knight, and Sir Galahad for fiction and poetry. However, her tales are far darker and more subversive. Instead of a wealthy court, her settings are the tenements and homes of the working poor; instead of lords and ladies in their finery, she writes protagonists in poor clothes, protagonists who are nonetheless heroic. As Jennifer Gehrman points out, “Phelps uses the mythic inhabitants of Camelot as heuristic devices to move her audience of middle- and upper-class readers to see the heroism, tragedy, and fundamental humanity of individuals they might otherwise ignore or reject” (123). In addition to drawing on and renovating Tennyson’s influence in terms of class, Phelps reworks the Arthurian legends into considerations of gender roles and inequalities. The stories of Arthur generally focus on men and were generally written by men. In Phelps’s versions, women become the central characters. As Alan Lupack suggests, women “by virtue of being outside the mainstream of Arthurian tradition, have been more inclined to radical reinterpretations and innovative reworkings of it” (4). Phelps is one of those innovators. In the stories that follow, she destroys the fanciful image of womanhood created by Tennyson, his precursors, and contemporaries, and she replaces it with a realistic depiction of woman’s suffering caused by a patriarchal system that restricted and impoverished them. Instead of one-dimensional heroes, female and male, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps peoples her version of Camelot with fully realized women and men and the facts which she feels Tennyson omitted: a little lady cursed by poverty and alcoholism, a beleaguered working-class knight, and a queen with a toothache rather than a lover.

## THE STORIES

“The Lady of Shalott” appeared in *The Independent* 6 July 1871: 1. Phelps later collected it in *Sealed Orders* (Boston: Houghton, Osgood and Company, 1879). It has been reprinted in Alan and Barbara Tewa Lupack’s *Arthurian Literature by Women*. (New York : Garland Pub., 1999).

“The Christmas of Sir Galahad” was first published in *The Independent* 7 Dec. 1871: 1, and later reprinted in the Lupack anthology.

“The True Story of Guenever” was originally published in *The Independent* 15 June 1876: 2-4. Phelps included it in *Sealed Orders*. More recently, it has been reprinted in Mike Ahsley’s *The Camelot Chronicles: Heroic Adventures from the Time of King Arthur* (New York: Carrol & Graf, 1992), and the Lupack anthology.



## THE LADY OF SHALOTT

It is not generally known that the Lady of Shalott lived last summer in an attic, at the east end of South Street.

The wee-est, thinnest, whitest little lady! And yet the brightest, stillest, and all, such a smiling little lady!

If you had held her up by the window—for she could not hold up herself—she would have hung like a porcelain transparency in your hands. And if you had said, laying her gently down, and giving the tears a smart dash, that they should not fall on her lifted face, “Poor child!” the Lady of Shalott would have said, “Oh, don’t!” and smiled. And you would have smiled yourself, for very surprise that she should outdo you; and between the two there would have been so much smiling done that one would have fairly thought that it was a delightful thing to live last summer in an attic at the east end of South Street.

This perhaps was the more natural in the Lady of Shalott because she had never lived anywhere else.

When the Lady of Shalott was five years old, her mother threw her downstairs one day, by mistake, instead of the whisky-jug.

This is a fact which I think Mr. Tennyson has omitted to mention in his poem.<sup>1</sup>

They picked the Lady of Shalott up and put her on the bed; and there she lay from that day until last summer, unless, as I said, somebody had occasion to use her for a transparency.

The mother and the jug both went down the stairs together a few years after, and never came up at all—and that was a great convenience, for the Lady of Shalott’s palace in the attic was not large, and they took up much unnecessary room.

Since that the Lady of Shalott had lived with her sister, Sary Jane.

Sary Jane made nankeen vests, at sixteen and three-quarter cents a dozen.<sup>2</sup>

Sary Jane had red hair, and crooked shoulders, and a voice so much like a rat-trap which she sometimes set on the stairs that the Lady of Shalott could seldom tell which was which until she had thought about it a little while. When there was a rat caught, she was apt to ask, “What?” and when Sary Jane spoke she more often than not said, “There’s another!”

Her crooked shoulders Sary Jane had acquired from sitting under the eaves of the palace to sew. That physiological problem was simple. There was not room enough under the eaves to sit straight.

Sary Jane’s red hair was the result of sitting in the sun on July noons under those eaves, to see to thread her needle. There was no question about that. The Lady of Shalott had settled it in her own mind, past dispute. Sary Jane’s hair had been—what was it? brown? once. Sary Jane was slowly taking fire. Who would not, to sit in the sun in that palace? The only matter of surprise to the Lady of Shalott was that the palace itself did not smoke. Sometimes, when Sary

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<sup>1</sup> Elaine of Astolat, or Elaine the Fair, of the Arthurian legends became “The Lady of Shalott” (1832, 1842) in the ballad by Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892). Widely popular through the nineteenth-century, the poem remains a classroom favorite today.

<sup>2</sup> Nankeen is coarse cotton fabric, originally manufactured in the Nanking area of China, usually yellowish in color from the variety of cotton, a cheap and serviceable cloth used for laborers’ clothing.

## The Lady of Shalott

Jane hit the rafters, she was sure that she saw sparks.

As for Sary Jane's voice, when one knew that she made nankeen vests at sixteen and three-quarter cents a dozen, *that* was a matter of no surprise. It never surprised the Lady of Shalott.

But Sary Jane was very cross; there was no denying that; very cross.

And the palace. Let me tell you about the palace. It measured just 12 by 9 feet. It would have been 7 feet post—if there had been a post in the middle of it. From the center it sloped away to the windows, where Sary Jane had just room enough to sit crooked under the eaves at work. There were two windows and a loose scuttle to the palace. The scuttle let in the snow in winter and the sun in summer, and the rain and wind at all times. It was quite a diversion to the Lady of Shalott to see how many different ways of doing a disagreeable thing seemed to be practicable to that scuttle. Besides the bed on which the Lady of Shalott lay, there was a stove in the palace, two chairs, a very ragged rag-mat, a shelf, with two notched cups and plates upon it, one pewter teaspoon, and a looking-glass. On washing-days Sary Jane climbed upon the chair and hung her clothes out through the scuttle on the roof; or else she ran a little rope from one of the windows to the other for a drying-rope. It would have been more exact to have said on washing-nights; for Sary Jane always did her washing after dark. The reason was evident. If the rest of us were in the habit of wearing all the clothes we had, like Sary Jane, I have little doubt that we should do the same.

I should mention that there was no sink in the Lady of Shalott's palace; no water. There was a dirty hydrant in the yard, four flights below, which supplied the Lady of Shalott and all her neighbors. The Lady of Shalott kept her coal under the bed; her flour, a pound at a time, in a paper parcel, on the shelf, with the teacups and the pewter spoon. If she had anything else to keep, it went out through the palace scuttle and lay on the roof. The Lady of Shalott's palace opened directly upon a precipice. The lessor of the house called it a flight of stairs. When Sary Jane went up and down, she went sideways to preserve her balance. There were no banisters to the precipice. The entry was dark. Some dozen or twenty of the Lady of Shalott's neighbors patronized the precipice, and about once a week a baby patronized the rat-trap, instead. Once, when there was a fire-alarm, the precipice was very serviceable. Four women and an old man went over. With one exception (she was eighteen, and could bear a broken collar-bone), they will not, I am informed, go over again.

The Lady of Shalott paid one dollar a week for the rent of her palace.

But then there was a looking-glass in the palace. I think I noticed it. It hung on the slope of the rafters, just opposite the Lady of Shalott's window—for she considered that her window at which Sary Jane did not make nankeen vests at sixteen and three-quarters cents a dozen.

Now, because the looking-glass was opposite the window at which Sary Jane did *not* make vests, and because the rafters sloped, and because the bed lay almost between the looking-glass and the window, the Lady of Shalott was happy. And because, to the patient heart that is a seeker after happiness "the little more, and how much it is!" (and the little less, what worlds away!) the Lady of Shalott was proud as well as happy.<sup>3</sup> The looking-glass measured in inches 10 by 6. I think that the Lady of Shalott would have experienced rather a touch of mortification than of envy if she had known that there was a mirror in a house just around the corner measuring almost as many feet. But that was one of the advantages of being the Lady of Shalott.

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<sup>3</sup> This quotation is from the "By the Fire-Side" section of *Men and Women* (1855) by Robert Browning (1812-1899).

She never parsed life in the comparative degree.

I suppose that one must *be* the Lady of Shalott to understand what comfort there may be in a 10 by 6 inch looking-glass. All the world came for the Lady of Shalott into her little looking-glass—the joy of it, the anguish of it, the hope and fear of it, the health and hurt—10 by 6 inches of it exactly.

“It is next best to not having been thrown down-stairs yourself!” said the Lady of Shalott.

To tell the truth, it sometimes occurred to her that there was a monotony about the world. A garret window like her own, for instance, would fill her sight if she did not tip the glass a little. Children sat in it, and did not play. They made lean faces at her. They were locked in for the day, and were hungry. She could not help knowing how hungry they were, and so tipped the glass. Then there was the trap-door in the sidewalk. She became occasionally tired of that trap-door. Seven people lived under the sidewalk; and when they lifted and slammed the trap, coming in and out, they reminded her of something which Sary Jane bought her once, when she was a very little child, at Christmas time—long ago, when rents were cheaper and flour low. It was a monkey, with whiskers and a calico jacket, who jumped out of a box when the cover was lifted; and then you crushed him down and hasped him in. Sometimes she wished that she had never had that monkey, he was so much like the people coming in and out of the sidewalk.

In fact, there was a monotony about all the people in the Lady of Shalott’s looking-glass. If their faces were not dirty, their hands were. If they had hats, they went without shoes. If they did not sit in the sun with their heads on their knees, they lay in the mud with their heads on a jug.

“Their faces look blue!” she said to Sary Jane.

“No wonder!” snapped Sary Jane.

“Why?” asked the Lady of Shalott.

“Wonder is we ain’t all dead!” barked Sary Jane.

“But we ain’t, you know,” said the Lady of Shalott, after some thought.

The people in the Lady of Shalott’s glass died, however, sometimes—often in the summer; more often last summer, when the attic smoked continually, and she mistook Sary Jane’s voice for the rat-trap every day.

The people were jostled into pine boxes (in the glass), and carried away (in the glass) by twilight, in a cart. Three of the monkeys from the spring-box in the sidewalk went, in one week, out into foul, purple twilight, away from the looking-glass, in carts.

“I’m glad of that, poor things!” said the Lady of Shalott, for she had always felt a kind of sorrow for the monkeys. Principally, I think, because they had no glass.

When the monkeys had gone, the sickly twilight folded itself up, over the spring-box, into great feathers, like the feathers of a wing. That was pleasant. The Lady of Shalott could almost put out her fingers and stroke it, it hung so near, and was so clear, and gathered such a peacefulness into the looking-glass.

“Sary Jane, dear, it’s very pleasant,” said the Lady of Shalott. Sary Jane said, it was very dangerous, the Lord knew, and bit her threads off.

“And, Sary Jane, dear!” added the Lady of Shalott, “I see so many other pleasant things.”

“The more fool you!” said Sary Jane.

But she wondered about it that day over her tenth nankeen vest. What, for example, *could* the Lady of Shalott see?

“Waves!” said the Lady of Shalott, suddenly, as if she had been asked the question. Sary Jane jumped. She said, “Nonsense!” For the Lady of Shalott had only seen the little wash-tub

## The Lady of Shalott

full of dingy water on Sunday nights, and the dirty little hydrant (in the glass) spouting dingy jets. She would not have known a wave if she had seen it.

“But I see waves,” said the Lady of Shalott. She felt sure of it. They ran up and down across the glass. They had green faces and gray hair. They threw back their hands, like cool people resting, and it seemed unaccountable, at the east end of South street last summer, that anything, anywhere, if only a wave in a looking-glass, could be cool or at rest. Besides this, they kept their faces clean. Therefore the Lady of Shalott took pleasure in watching them run up and down across the glass. That a thing could be clean, and green, and white, was only less a wonder than cool and rest last summer in South street.

“Sary Jane, dear,” said the Lady of Shalott, one day, “how hot *is* it up here?”

“Hot as Hell!” said Sary Jane.

“I thought it was a little warm,” said the Lady of Shalott. “Sary Jane, dear? Isn’t the yard down there a little—dirty?”

Sary Jane put down her needles and looked out of the blazing, blindless window. It had always been a subject of satisfaction to Sary Jane somewhere down below her lean shoulders and in the very teeth of the rat-trap that the Lady of Shalott could not see out of that window. So she winked at the window, as if she would caution it to hold its burning tongue, and said never a word.

“Sary Jane, dear,” said the Lady of Shalott, once more, “had you ever thought that perhaps I was a little—weaker—than I was—once?”

“I guess you can stand it if I can!” said the rat-trap.

“Oh, yes, dear,” said the Lady of Shalott. “I can stand it if you can.”

“Well, then!” said Sary Jane. But she sat and winked at the bald window, and the window held its burning tongue.

It grew hot in South street. It grew very hot in South street. The lean children in the attic opposite fell sick, and sat no longer in the window making faces, in the Lady of Shalott’s glass.

Two more monkeys from the spring-box were carried away one ugly twilight in a cart. The purple wing that hung over the spring-box lifted to let them pass; and then fell, as if it had brushed them away.

“It has such a soft color!” said the Lady of Shalott, smiling.

“So has night-shade!” said Sary Jane.

One day a beautiful thing happened. One can scarcely understand how a beautiful thing *could* happen at the east end of South Street. The Lady of Shalott herself did not entirely understand.

“It is all the glass,” she said.

She was lying very still when she said it. She had folded her hands, which were hot, to keep them quiet, too. She had closed her eyes, which ached, to close away the glare of the noon. At once she opened them, and said:

“It is the glass.”

Sary Jane stood in the glass. Now Sary Jane, she well knew, was not in the room that noon. She had gone out to see what she could find for dinner. She had five cents to spend on dinner. Yet Sary Jane stood in the glass. And in the glass, ah! what a beautiful thing!

“Flowers!” cried the Lady of Shalott aloud. But she had never seen flowers. But neither had she seen waves. So she said, “They come as the waves come.” And knew them and lay smiling. Ah! what a beautiful, beautiful thing!

Sary Jane’s hair was fiery and tumbled (in the glass), as if she had walked fast and far.

Sary Jane (in the glass) was winking, as she had winked at the blazing window; as if she said to what she held in her arms, Don't tell! And in her arms (in the glass), where the waves were—oh! beautiful, beautiful! The Lady of Shalott lay whispering: “Beautiful, beautiful!” She did not know what else to do. She dared not stir. Sary Jane's lean arms (in the glass) were full of silver bells; they hung out of a soft green shadow, like a church tower; they nodded to and fro; when they shook, they shook out sweetness.

“Will they ring?” asked the Lady of Shalott of the little glass.

I doubt, in my own mind, if you or I, being in South street, and seeing a lily of the valley (in a 10 by 6 inch looking-glass) for the very first time, would have asked so sensible a question.

“Try 'em and see,” said the looking-glass. Was it the looking-glass? Or the rat-trap? Or was it—

Oh, the beautiful thing! That the glass should have nothing to do with it, after all! That Sary Jane, in flesh and blood, and tumbled hair, and trembling, lean arms, should stand and shake an armful of church towers and silver bells down into the Lady of Shalott's little puzzled face and burning hands!

And that the Lady of Shalott should think that she must have got into the glass herself, by a blunder—as the only explanation possible of such a beautiful thing!

“No, it isn't glass-dreams,” said Sary Jane, winking at the church towers, where they made a solemn green shadow against the Lady of Shalott's bent cheek. “Smell 'em and see! You can 'most stand the yard with them round. Smell 'em and see! It ain't the glass; it's the Flower Charity.”<sup>4</sup>

“The what?” asked the Lady of Shalott, slowly.

“The Flower Charity. Heaven bless it!”

“Heaven bless it!” said the Lady of Shalott. But she said nothing more.

She laid her cheek over into the shadow of the green church towers. “And there'll be more,” said Sary Jane, hunting for her wax. “There'll be more, whenever I can call for 'em—bless it!”

“Heaven bless it!” said the Lady of Shalott again.

“But I only got a lemon for dinner,” said Sary Jane.

“Heaven bless it!” said the Lady of Shalott, with her face hidden under the church towers. But I don't think that she meant the lemon, though Sary Jane did.

“They *do* ring,” said the Lady of Shalott, by and by. She drew the tip of her thin fingers across the tip of the tiny bells. “I thought they would.”

“Humph!” said Sary Jane, squeezing her lemon under her work-box. “I never see your beat for glass-dreams. What do they say? Come, now!”

Now the Lady of Shalott knew very well what they said. Very well! But she only drew the tips of her poor fingers over the tips of the silver bells. Clever mind! It was not necessary to

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<sup>4</sup> The “Flower Mission” is described in the “Home and Society” column of *Scribner's Monthly* 8 (July 1874): 371 as a charitable mission originating in Boston and operated by women's church organizations. The columnist exhorts every beneficent society to take part: “let the sweetest offerings of Nature be brought to those who cannot seek for themselves.” Following Phelps, William Dean Howells take a more critical view of these charities in his novel *The Minister's Charge* (1885), where idle women are ridiculed for bringing flowers instead of more lasting help.

## The Lady of Shalott

tell Sary Jane.

But it grew hot in South street. It grew very hot in South street. Even the Flower Charity (bless it!) could not sweeten the dreadfulness of that yard. Even the purple wing above the spring-box fell heavily upon the Lady of Shalott's strained eyes, across the glass. Even the gray-haired waves ceased running up and down and throwing back their hands before her; they sat still, in heaps upon a blistering beach, and gasped for breath. The Lady of Shalott herself gasped sometimes, in watching them.

One day she said: "There's a man in them."

"A *what* in *which*?" buzzed Sary Jane. "Oh! There's a man across the yard, I suppose you mean. Among them young ones, yonder. I wish he'd stop 'em throwing stones, plague on 'em! See him, don't you?"

"I don't see the children," said the Lady of Shalott, a little troubled. Her glass had shown her so many things strangely since the days grew hot. "But I see a man, and he walks upon waves. See, see!"

The Lady of Shalott tried to pull herself upon the elbow of her calico night-dress, to see.

"That's one of them Hospital doctors," said Sary Jane, looking out of the blazing window. "I've seen him round before. Don't know what business he's got down here; but I've seen him. He's talkin' to them boys now, about the stones. There! He'd better! If they don't look out, they'll hit"—

*"Oh the glass! the glass!"*

The Hospital Doctor stood still; so did Sary Jane, half risen from her chair; so did the very South Street boys, gaping in the gutter, with their hands full of stones,—such a cry rang out from the palace window.

*"Oh, the glass! the glass! the glass!"*

In a twinkling the South-street boys were at the mercy of the South-street police; and the Hospital Doctor, bounding over a beachful of shattered, scattered waves, stood, out of breath, beside the Lady of Shalott's bed.

"Oh the little less and what worlds away."

The Lady of Shalott lay quite still in her little brown calico night-gown—[I cannot learn, by the way, that Bulfinch's studious and in general trustworthy researchers have put him in possession of this point. Indeed, I feel justified in asserting that Mr. Bullfinch never so much as *intimated* that the Lady of Shalott wore a brown calico night-dress.]—the Lady of Shalott lay quite still, and her lips turned blue.<sup>5</sup>

"Are you very much hurt? Where were you struck? I heard the cry, and came. Can you tell me where the blow was?"

But then the Doctor saw the glass, broken and blown in a thousand glittering sparks across the palace floor; and then the Lady of Shalott gave him a little blue smile.

"It's not me. Never mind. I wish it was. I'd rather it was me than the glass. Oh, my glass! My glass! But never mind. I suppose there'll be some other—pleasant thing."

"Were you so fond of the glass?" asked the Doctor, taking one of the two chairs that Sary Jane brought him, and looking sorrowfully about the room. What other "pleasant thing" could even the Lady of Shalott discover in that room last summer, at the east end of South street?

"How long have you lain here?" asked the sorrowful Doctor, suddenly.

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas Bulfinch (1797-1867) tells a version of the story in the "Age of Fable" (1855) volume of *Bulfinch's Mythology* (1855-1863).

“Since I can remember, sir,” said the Lady of Shalott, with that blue smile. “But then I have always had my glass.”

“Ah!” said the Doctor, “the Lady of Shalott!”

“Sir?” said the Lady of Shalott.

“Where is the pain?” asked the Doctor, gently, with his finger on the Lady of Shalott’s pulse.

The Lady of Shalott touched the shoulders of her brown calico night-dress, smiling.

“And what did you see in your glass?” asked the Doctor, once more, stooping to examine “the pain.”

The Lady of Shalott tried to tell him, but felt confused; so many strange things had been in the glass since it grew hot. So she only said that there were waves and a purple wing, and that they were broken now, and lay upon the floor.

“Purple wings?” asked the Doctor.

“Over the sidewalk,” nodded the Lady of Shalott. “It comes up at night.”

“Oh!” said the Doctor, “the malaria. No wonder!”

“And what about the waves?” asked the Doctor, talking while he touched and tried the little brown calico shoulders. “I have a little girl of my own down by the waves this summer. She—I suppose she is no older than you!”

“I am seventeen, sir,” said the Lady of Shalott. “Do they have green faces and white hair? Does she see them run up and down? I never saw any waves, sir, but those in my glass. I am very glad to know that your little girl is by the waves.”

“Where *you* ought to be,” said the Doctor, half under his breath. “It is cruel, cruel!”

“What is cruel?” asked the Lady of Shalott, looking up into the Doctor’s face.

The little brown calico night-dress swam suddenly before the Doctor’s eyes. He got up and walked across the room. As he walked he stepped upon the pieces of the broken glass.

“Oh, don’t!” cried the Lady of Shalott. But then she thought that perhaps she had hurt the Doctor’s feelings; so she smiled, and said, “Never mind.”

“Her case could be cured,” said the Doctor, still under his breath, to Sary Jane. “The case could be cured yet. It is cruel!”

“Sir,” said Sary Jane—she lifted her sharp face sharply out of billows of nankeen vests—“it may be because I make vests at sixteen and three-quarter cents a dozen, sir; but I say before God there’s *something* cruel *somewheres*. Look at her. Look at me. Look at them stairs. Just see that scuttle, will you? Just feel the sun in t’ these windows. Look at the rent we pay for this ’ere oven. What do you ’spose the merkiry is up here? Look at them pisen fogs arisin’ out over the sidewalk. Look at the dead as have died in the Devil in this street this week. The look out here!”

Sary Jane drew the Doctor to the blazing, blindless window, out of which the Lady of Shalott had never looked.

“Now talk of curin’ *her*!” said Sary Jane.

The Doctor turned away from the window, with a sudden white face.

“The Board of Health—”

“Don’t talk to *me* about the Board of Health!” said Sary Jane.

“I’ll talk to *them*,” said the Doctor. “I did not know matters were so bad. They shall be attended to directly. To-morrow I leave town”—he stopped, looking down at the Lady of Shalott, thinking of the little lady by the waves, whom he would see to-morrow, hardly knowing what to say. “But something shall be done at once. Meantime, there’s the Hospital.”

## The Lady of Shalott

“She tried Horspital long ago,” said Sary Jane. “They said they couldn’t do nothing. What’s the use? Don’t bother her. Let her be.”

“Yes, let me be,” said the Lady of Shalott, faintly. “The glass is broken.”

“But something must be done!” urged the Doctor, hurrying away. “I will attend to the matter directly, directly.”

He spoke in a busy doctor’s busy way. Undoubtedly he thought that he should attend to the matter directly.

“You have flowers here, I see.” He lifted, in hurrying away, a spray of lilies that lay upon the bed, freshly sent to the Lady of Shalott that morning.

“They ring,” said the Lady of Shalott, softly. “Can you hear? ‘*Bless—it! Bless—it!*’ Ah, yes, they ring!”

“Bless what?” asked the Doctor, half out of the door.

“The Flower Charity,” said the Lady of Shalott.

“*Amen!*” said the Doctor. “But I’ll attend to it directly.” And he was quite out of the door, and the door was shut.

“Sary Jane, dear?” said the Lady of Shalott, a few minutes after.

“Well!” said Sary Jane.

“The glass is broken,” said the Lady of Shalott.

“Should think I might know that!” said Sary Jane, who was down upon her knees sweeping shining pieces away into a paste-board dust-pan.

“Sary Jane, dear?” said the Lady of Shalott again.

“Dear, dear!” echoed Sary Jane, tossing purple feathers out of the window and seeming, to the eyes of the Lady of Shalott, to have the spray of green waves upon her hands. “There they go!”

“Yes, there they go!” said the Lady of Shalott. But she said no more till night.

It was a hot night for South street. It was a very hot night for even South street. The lean children in the attic opposite cried savagely, like lean cubs. The monkeys from the spring-box came out and sat upon the lid for air. Dirty people lay around the dirty hydrant; and the purple wing stretched itself a little in a quiet way, to cover them.

“Sary Jane, dear?” said the Lady of Shalott, at night. “The glass is broken. And, Sary Jane, dear, I am afraid I *can’t* stand it as well as you can.”

Sary Jane gave the Lady of Shalott a sharp look, and put away her nankeen vests. She came to the bed.

“It isn’t time to stop sewing, is it?” asked the Lady of Shalott, in faint surprise. Sary Jane only gave her sharp looks and said:

“Nonsense! That man will be back again yet. He’ll look after ye, maybe. Nonsense!”

“Yes,” said the Lady of Shalott, “he will come back again. But my glass is broken.”

“Nonsense!” said Sary Jane. But she did not go back to her sewing. She sat down on the edge of the bed, by the Lady of Shalott; and it grew dark.

“Perhaps they ’ll do something about the yards; who knows?” said Sary Jane.

“But my glass is broken,” said the Lady of Shalott.

“Sary Jane, dear!” said the Lady of Shalott, when it had grown quite, quite dark. “He is walking on the waves.”

“Nonsense!” said Sary Jane. For it was quite, quite dark.

“Sary Jane, dear!” said the Lady of Shalott. “Not that man. But there *is* a man, and he is walking on the waves.”



The Lady of Shalott raised herself upon her calico night-dress sleeve. She looked at the wall where the 10 by 6 inch looking-glass had hung.

“Sary Jane, dear!” said the Lady of Shalott. “I am glad that girl is down by the waves. I am very glad. But the glass is broken.”

Two days after, the Board of Health at the foot of the precipice which the lessor called a flight of stairs, the one which led into the Lady of Shalott’s palace, were met and stopped by another board.

“*This one’s got the right of way, gentlemen!*” said something at the brink of the precipice, which sounded so much like a rat-trap that the Board of Health looked down by instinct at its individual and collective feet, to see if they were in danger, and dared not by instinct stir a step.

The board which had the right of way was a pine board, and the Lady of Shalott lay on it, in her little brown calico night-dress, with Sary Jane’s old shawl across her feet. The Flower Charity (Heaven bless it!) had half-covered the old shawl with silver bells, and solemn green shadows, like the shadows of church towers. And it was a comfort to know that these were the only bells which tolled for the Lady of Shalott, and that no other church shadow fell upon her burial.

“Gentlemen,” said the Hospital Doctor, “we’re too late, I see. But you’d better go on.”

The gentlemen of the Board of Health went on; and the Lady of Shalott went on.

The Lady of Shalott went out into the cart that had carried away the monkeys from the spring-box, and the purple wing lifted to let her pass; and fell again, as if it had brushed her away.

The Board of Health went up the precipice, and stood by the window out of which the Lady of Shalott had never looked.

They sent orders to the scavenger, and orders to the Water Board, and how many other orders nobody knows; and they sprinkled themselves with camphor, and they went their ways.

And the board that had the right of way went its way, too. And Sary Jane folded up the shawl, which she could not afford to lose, and came home, and made nankeen vests at sixteen and three-quarter cents a dozen in the window out of which the Lady of Shalott had never looked.

## THE CHRISTMAS OF SIR GALAHAD

When a fancy, fashioned neither after the inductive nor the deductive methods, attributable neither to natural selection nor to protoplasm, definable by no law of contradiction nor of excluded middle, presents itself to the public acquaintance nowadays, it is apt, as we all know, to receive rather a sorry welcome. And when, after the sadly tardy discovery of the Lady of Shalott, in South street, one of those remarkable rumors, credence to which is at once a danger and a delight, stole about town, it stole on tiptoe, looking over its shoulder meanwhile at corners with one soft sly eye on the police and another on the daily press, and a startled glance at the fashionable churches, and a tender shudder at the shadow of the "Institute," and its beautiful finger at its lips—making thus slow progress, and, for every warmhearted faith which it shook by the outstretched hand, leaving two doubts to close ranks behind it.

Such as it is, however, and for what it may mean, this is the whisper. It would be found, so it is said, had we the eyes that see or the ears that hear either signs or sounds of such a matter, that certain of the old romances which we have been accustomed to regard as finished and fated for all time are, in fact, re-enacting and repeating themselves, with a timidity amounting almost to stealth, in the chilling and alien climate of our modern civilization: that steam has not scorched out valor, nor the telegraph overtaken chivalry, nor universal suffrage extinguished loyalty; that the golden years did not go dumbly to their graves, as we are wont to think; that they have arisen, like Lazarus, with their chin-cloths on, acquainted with things unlawful to utter—reserved, still visitors, shunned and strange.<sup>1</sup> It is breathed that there somewhere walks the earth to-day the Blameless King; it is hinted that there somewhere hides the Mismatched Queen; it has been said that at times the Vanished Knights of the Round Table gather together in strange guise, to stranger conclave; that a student familiar with their story would be well puzzled should he stumble upon them; that Sir Percivale has been seen in a Pennsylvania coal-mine; that Bohort was discovered in New York one day, in a bricklayer's apron, with a trowel in his hand; that Isoude the Fair was all but identified in a hospital at Washington during the War of the Rebellion; that Launcelot, penitent and pale, may be heard, if one is so fortunate as to trace him, in the form of a certain street preacher, but little known, who gathers ill-favored men and women about him in an unsavory part of the town at the decline of the Sunday afternoon; that Guinevere is rumored to spend much time alone in a chamber looking toward the west, engaged in keeping a certain watch which has been set her, for a peril and a promise which no man knows; that Arthur himself filled a post of high official importance at Washington not long ago, and, escaping identification through two terms' service, disappeared suddenly and mysteriously from public life; that, in short, a Romance never died, nor ever will, but is adjudged to be the only immortal thing on earth, save the soul of man.

As much as this, in common with a few others, so far favored, I had heard and forgotten, till chance threw the whole chain of pretty dreams before me, by lassoing one link around my very hands. As much as this I found myself compelled to recall with more than common thoughtfulness when I came face to face with Sir Galahad at a butcher's stall, last Christmas morning.

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<sup>1</sup> In the Gospel of John, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Phelps includes biblical references through this story, from both the Old Testament, Eve and Isaac, and the New, Christmas, Lazarus and the Sangreal.

Did you ever know a lost knight to be found until a woman tracked him? Is it, therefore, surprising that if it had not been for Rebecca Rock, Sir Galahad Holt would have escaped recognition completely, and the modest number of men and women now admitted to the secret of the discovery have gone the hungrier and the sadder for the loss?

It was always a matter of deep scientific speculation to Rebecca Rock why, when she came to town to find work in the neck-tie factory, she should have chosen lodgings in the second back corner of 16 ½ Primrose Court. She would say: “If I had hit on the western side!” or, “If I had been able to pay the rent of that room opposite the factory!” or, “How near I came to settling on the little south attic of 17!”

And she sat and mused upon it with a puzzled face. If, indeed! What an “If” it was! Such an If as there would have been in the world if that other Rebecca had taken the wrong road and missed of meeting Isaac in the desert at the set of the sun; or if Eve had lost her way in the shrubbery of Eden, and just happened not to find Adam till nobody knows when!

Perhaps, too, such an If as there would have been if Heloise had never gone to school to Abelard, or Di Rimini had never seen her lover’s face?<sup>2</sup> The world would have lost a grand temptation. So much as that, Rebecca Rock, cutting “foundation” into strips for the public neck, eleven hours a day, confusedly felt; but she had never heard of Heloise, and if she had been obliged to sit beside Francesca Di Rimini in the necktie factory she would have shrunk in the wounded wonder of a snow-drift from a foot-mark.

How long it was before Galahad Holt, coming home from the organ factory at seven o’clock to his solitary ground-floor lodging at 16 ½, noticed the tall woman in the blanket shawl, who came a little later and passed his door in going up-stairs; how long before a sense of anything more than tallness and a shawl occurred to him; how soon he noticed the outline of her arm when the shawl fell from it, as she laid her large, strong hand upon the banisters; when he first observed the regular, calm echo which her step left upon the croaking stairs; when first he met her carrying a pail of water from the Court, and instead of feeling moved to carry it for her, only thought how evenly she carried it for herself; when first she smiled at suddenly observing him; when first he gravely said good-morning; when first he gravely joined her if they chanced upon the same side of the street in passing to and fro from work; how first he gravely learned to discuss with her the fall in wages, and the wind we had on Saturday, the rise in coal, and the sunset there would be to-night; and when first he gravely came to feel that wind and fuel, sun and pay-day were no longer common matters for the common world in consequence, but a heritage of his and her discovery, ownership, and wealth, is not accurately known.

Strictly speaking, he himself knew accurately nothing. He worked, he ate, he slept; he shut himself into his lonely lodging (it was so singular, said all the Court, in Sir Galahad to board himself!); suns rose and set; she smiled and came and went; but he knew distinctly nothing. Nothing till, once upon a Sunday afternoon, he followed her to a little mission church they knew, sat on a wooden bench and watched her sing; but left in the middle of the chorus, and went abruptly home. He shut and locked the door; he stood still in the middle of the room.

“God bless her!” he said aloud. But he sat down and covered his face with his grimy, princely hands, and flushed as if he had done her a deadly wrong.

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<sup>2</sup>Heloise (1101-1162) was an insightful scholar, although she is best known for her illicit relationship with scholastic philosopher Peter Abélard. Francesca Di Rimini lived in 13<sup>th</sup> century Italy and was murdered by her betrothed when she was discovered having an affair with his brother.

## The Christmas of Sir Galahad

Had he the right to take a woman into his swept and garnished heart, even long enough to bless her in God's name and let her go? "It would turn to curses," said Sir Galahad, "upon us both. I will not bless her." Now he turned his head, at this, and saw her coming up the Court. "I will not, will not!" said Sir Galahad. But all his soul rose up and went to meet her, and laid his hands upon her head in benediction. And when Sir Galahad felt within himself that this was so, he fell upon his knees, and there remained till midnight. And in the morning he arose with a countenance as calm as ever knight wore in love or death or victory, and went away in his blue overalls to work, with his dinner-pail upon his arm, and nodded gravely to Rebecca; but smiled little and spoke less.

And so the Lady Rebecca, grieved and puzzled in her heart, would have dropped a tear or two upon her foundation strips, but for a heat upon her cheeks that burned and dried them all the day; and so at night, being feverish and wakeful, and, stepping down into the Court at an early hour for fresh water, she came suddenly upon a woman clambering into Sir Galahad's low window.

So she dropped her pail, and, in the icy swash that fell about her feet, sat down to catch her breath.

There, in the mud-puddle which the chilly water made, Sir Galahad found her sitting, when he had shut his window, had turned the key in his door, had come out, and had stopped and stood beside her.

"That's my wife, Rebecca, I've just locked in, in there," said Sir Galahad, standing in the starlight. "Will you come to the window and take a look at her?"

"I'd rather not," said Rebecca from her mud-puddle; but she rose, and shook the spatter from her clothes.

"Very well," said Galahad.

"You never told me," said Rebecca, picking up her pail, "that you had a wife, Sir Galahad!" "I never thought of it till yesterday," said Galahad. "I ought to have. I ask your pardon, Miss Rebecca. She's crazy."

"Oh!" said the Lady Rebecca, stretching out her strong, large hand; but she drew it back, and hid it in her shawl.

"And takes opium," said Galahad Holt, patiently, "and is up to pretty much everything. It's going on six year now sence she left me. But she keeps a coming on me unexpected. The ground floor's saved a deal of talk and shame, I think; don't you? I thought I'd best keep house for her, all things taken in't the count; don't you? Sometimes I think she'll slick herself up a little and stay. But in a day or two she's off. She's got the Old Un in her head to-night," said Galahad.

"It's very hard; it's very, very hard!" Rebecca moaned.

"Rebecca Rock," said Sir Galahad, solemnly, "it's a curious place and time to say it; but I think there'll never come a better—"

"Oh! No," said Rebecca.

"And I may as well out with it, my girl, first as last, and once for all, and tell you how, if *you'd* been my wife, instead of her, I couldn't have loved you truer nor more single in my heart than I love you in the sight of God and these here stars this wretched night. And I'm a married man!"

"Oh! yes, yes!" said Rebecca.

"But I'm a married man," said he.

"People unmarry," said she.

She looked in a frightened way about the Court, at the stars, at the pump, at the mud-puddle; she gasped and thrust her hand out, but drew it back within her shawl. Sir Galahad did not touch it.

“I suppose,” said Sir Galahad, very slowly, “as I could get divorced from Merry Ann. I’ve thought o’t. I thought o’t yesterday a long while. But it seems to me as if I’d better not. She’d be a coming back, ye see. Anyways, she’d be a living on this living arth. We might be meeting her face to face most any day. It seems to me, Rebecca, as if it was agin Natur for me to marry any woman while Merry Ann’s a living creetur. How does it seem to you?”

“Galahad Holt,” said Rebecca, “I’m not so good as you, and I’m very fond of you.”

“For God’s sake, don’t tell me o’t!” cried Sir Galahad.

“Well, I won’t,” said Rebecca.

“For, if it’s agin Natur,” said Sir Galahad, lifting his face to the stars above Primrose Court, “it’s agin God. And rather than *be* agin them two I’d be on’t the safe side, it seems to me.”

“Very well,” said Rebecca.

“So I think we’ll wait,” said Sir Galahad, taking off his hat and holding out his hand.

“Is the safe side always the right side, Galahad?” asked Rebecca.

“I don’t exactly know,” said Sir Galahad, with a puzzled face.

“Nor I,” said Rebecca; “but I think we’ll wait.”

“Some folks wouldn’t,” said Sir Galahad. “But I don’t see as that makes any odds.”

“No,” said Rebecca. So they shook hands, while Sir Galahad stood with his hat off beneath the stars; and the Lady Rebecca picked up her pail from the mud-puddle, and went up-stairs; and Sir Galahad went to the grocer’s to get a little tea for his wife; and the world ran on as if nothing had happened.

Now the world had been running on quite as if nothing would ever happen again for four years, when Sir Galahad’s Christmas came. And the Lady Rebecca had walked alone to the neck-tie factory; and Galahad had kept house on the ground floor; and Rebecca had lain sick of a deadly fever, and Sir Galahad had lost six months’ wages in a strike; and the man’s face had grown gaunt, and the woman’s old, and his had pinched and hers had paled:—yet their hands had never met since they stood by the pump in the starlight; nor had Sir Galahad’s knightly foot once crossed the croaking stairs which bore the regular, calm feet of the Lady Rebecca to the solitary second back corner of 16 ½; nor had he said, God bless her! when she sung at the little church, lest, indeed, his whole soul should rise up perforce, and choose cursing for blessing and death for life.

And if Di Rimini had worked beside Rebecca at the neck-tie factory, she would have learned a royal lesson. And Abelard might well have sat at the feet of Galahad, making organs with his grimy hands. And if Eve or Isaac had wandered into the first floor front, or second back corner of 16 ½, on a lonesome, rainy evening, they would have wept for pity, and smiled for blessing, and mused much.

Now, it was on a rainy evening, with melting snow upon the ground and melting chills upon the wind, that the Lady Rebecca, crooked and crouching by her little lamp, sat darning stockings for Sir Galahad—a questionable exercise of taste, we must admit. She had not even offered to embroider him a banner, nor to net him a silken favor, nor to fringe so much as a scarf for the next tournament to be held in Primrose Court. She had only said: “Will it be proper?” And he said: “Ask the landlady.” And the landlady had said: “Law, yes!” And Rebecca had said:

## The Christmas of Sir Galahad

“Bring all you have.” And Sir Galahad said: “I haven’t got but two pairs to my name.” And so here she was, crouching and darning and crooked, by her little lamp, when a knock startled the door of the second back corner of 16 ½ till it shook for fright to its sunken hinges, and the Lady Rebecca shook for sympathy till she opened the door, and shook on her own account when she had.

For Sir Galahad Holt stood in the door, erect and pale.

“I did not hear you on the stairs!” gasped the Lady Rebecca.

“I couldn’t come up them stairs in my boots someway,” said Sir Galahad, very huskily. Now the Lady Rebecca did not altogether understand in her own mind what Sir Galahad meant; but she saw that his feet lay bare and white upon her threshold—since, indeed, poor man! she had his stockings—and a fancy as of patient pilgrims came to her, and a dream of holy ground. But she said:

“Did you come to get the stockings?” But Sir Galahad answered solemnly:

“Did you think I’d cross the stairway till I came for you? Merry Ann’s down below, Rebecca. Will you be afraid to step down with me?”

Where would Rebecca have been afraid to step with him? She followed him down the stairs, which would have croaked, it seemed, but could not, beneath Sir Galahad’s solemn, shining feet.

Merry Ann was below, indeed—at length upon Sir Galahad’s floor, before the cook-stove, a sickening, silent heap. A little shawl was tied about her head, and her face was hidden on her arm.

“I but just come in and found her,” said Sir Galahad, in his commonplace, unromantic way; “and I thought I’d tell you what had happened, Rebecca, before the coroner was called. I don’t think it was a fit. She’d walked a distance, I can’t but think, and hoped to have caught a look at me. Poor Merry Ann!”

“Poor Merry Ann!” said Rebecca Rock, with all her heart. She had fallen on her knees beside the dead, and had dropped her face into her hands.

“And now Rebecca,” said Sir Galahad. “Now Rebecca—” But when he saw her on her knees he dropped beside her and said no more. And when the landlady came in they did not ask her if it were proper; but she said “Law, yes!” as if they had, and turned her face away.

“And now, Rebecca,” said Sir Galahad again—“now the grave is covered decent, and the room is swept, and the storm is over, and I’ve waited four years for you honest, in the sight of God and the stars o’ Heaven, and Christmas comes o’ Monday—”

“Very well,” said Rebecca.

“I don’t seem,” said Sir Galahad, “to have the words I thought I had to say, my girl. I’d got so used waiting; hadn’t you? I do not rightly see my way to take it natural and safe. I think I’d not like, nor dare, my dear, to have it any other day than Christmas Day; would you?”

I was glad there was no wind on Christmas, and that the snow lay drifted over from a little, laughing storm; and that the sun brooded with golden wings in the Primrose Court; and that the town was full of holly; and that the Lady Rebecca had a spray of myrtle in her large, firm hand, when she walked with Sir Galahad to the minister’s front door.

And when I met Sir Galahad at the meat-stall, buying steak for dinner, and saw the eyes and smile he carried in the sight of God and Christmas Day, I bethought me of the records of the Spotless Knight; how he—tried, stainless, and alone—was found worthy to be the guardian

(“pure in thought and word and deed”) of the blessed cup from which our Lord drank the last wine which should touch his lips till he drank it new in the kingdom of the Father; how his mortal eyes beheld it, palled in red samite, treasured by “a great fellowship of angels”; how his mortal hand laid hold of it and Heaven, and his mortal name grew to be a holy thing upon the lips of men forever; and how since then “was there never one so hardy as to say that he had seen the Sangreal on earth any more.”<sup>3</sup>

“Sir Galahad,” said I, “you have found the Sangreal, and I have found you!”

But he, smiling, shook his head.

“I don’t feel altogether sure. It seems to me a man don’t know what he’s found till he’s learned to bear his happiness as he bore his longing for’t, and his waiting, and his loss. But I can’t help hoping, somehow, that I’m fit to be married on a Christmas Day.”

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<sup>3</sup> Samite was a rich silk fabric worn in the Middle Ages, and was sometimes interwoven with gold.

## THE TRUE STORY OF GUENEVER

In all the wide, dim, dead, old world of story, there is to me no wraith more piteously pursuant than the wraith of Guenever. No other voice has in it the ring of sweet harmonies so intricately bejangled; no other face turns to us eyes of such luminous entreaty from slow descents of despair; no other figure, majestic though in ruins, carries through every strained muscle and tense nerve and full artery, so magnetic a consciousness of the deeps of its deserved humiliation and the height of its lost privilege. One pauses as before an awful problem, before the nature of this miserable lady. A nature wrought, it is plain, of the finer tissues, since it not only won but returned the love of the blameless king. One follows her young years with bated breath. We see a delicate, high-strung, impulsive creature, a trifle mismated to a faultless, unimpulsive man. We shudder to discover in her, before she discovers it for or in herself, that, having given herself to Arthur, she yet has not given all; that there arises now another self, and existence hitherto unknown, unsuspected—a character groping, unstable, unable, a wandering wind, a mist of darkness, a chaos, over which Arthur has no empire, of which he has no comprehension, and of which she—whether of Nature or of training who shall judge?—has long since discrowned herself the Queen. Guenever is unbalanced, crude, primeval woman. She must be at once passionately wooed and peremptorily ruled; and in wooing or in ruling there must be no despondencies or declines. There are no soundings to be found in her capacities of loving, as long as the mariner cares to go on striking for them. At his peril let him hold his plummet lightly or weary of the sweet toil taken in the measure of it. At his peril, and at hers.

To Arthur love is a state, not a process; an atmosphere, not a study; an assurance, not a hope; a fact, not an ideal. He is serene, reflective, a statesman. The Queen is intense, ill-educated, idle. Undreamed of by the one, unsuspected by the other, they grow apart. Ungoverned, how shall Guenever govern herself? Misinterpreted, value herself? Far upon the sunlit moor, a speck against the pure horizon, Launcelot rides—silent, subtle, swift, as Fate rides ever....

Poor Guenever! After all, poor Guenever! Song and story, life and death are so cruel to a woman. To Launcelot, repentant, is given in later life the best thing left upon earth for a penitent man—a spotless son. To Launcelot is reserved the aureola of that blessed fatherhood from which sprang the finder of the Holy Graal, “pure in thought and word and deed.” To Guenever is given the convent and solitary expiation. To Guenever disgrace, exile, and despair. Prone upon the convent floor, our fancy leaves her, kissing Arthur’s kingly and forgiving, but departing feet, half dead for joy because he bids her hope that in some other world—in which she has not sinned—those spotless feet may yet return to her, her true and stronger soul return to him; but neither in this world—never in this. Poor soul! Erring, weak, unclean; but for that, and that, and that, poor soul! poor soul! I can never bear to leave her there upon the convent floor. I rebel against the story. I am sure the half of it was never told us. It must be that Arthur went back some autumn day and brought her gravely home. It *must* be that penitence and patience and acquired purity shall some time win the respect and confidence of men, as they receive the respect and confidence of God. It must be that at some distant but approaching day *something* of the tenderness of divine stainlessness shall creep into the instinct of human imperfectness and a repentant sinner become to human estimates an object sorrowful, appalling, but appealing, sacred, and sweet.

Who can capture the where, the how, the wherefore of a train of fancy? Was it because I



thought of Guenever that I heard the story? Or because I heard the story that I thought of Guenever? My washwoman told it, coming in that bitter day at twilight and sitting by the open fire, as I had bidden her, for rest and warmth. What should *she* know of the Bulfinch and Ellis and Tennyson and Dunlop, that had fallen from my lap upon the cricket at her feet, that she should sit, with hands across her draggled knees, and tell me such a story? Or were Bulfinch and the rest untouched upon the library shelves till after she had told it? Whether the legend drew me to the fact, or the fact impelled me to the legend? Indeed, why should I know? It is enough that I heard the story. She told it in her way. I, for lack of her fine, dry, realistic manner, must tell it in my own.

Queen Guenever had the toothache. Few people can look pretty with the toothache. The cheeks of royalty itself will swell, and princely eyelids redden, and queenly lips assume contours as unaesthetic as the kitchen-maids', beneath affliction so plebeian. But Guenever looked pretty.

She abandoned herself to misery, to begin with, in such a royal fashion. And, by the way, we may notice that in nothing does blood tell more sharply than in the endurance of suffering. There is a vague monotony in the processes of wearing pleasure. Happy people are very much alike. In the great republic of joy we find tremendous and humiliating levels. When we lift our heads to bear the great crown of pain all the “points” of the soul begin to make themselves manifest at once.

Guenever yielded herself to this vulgar agony with a beautiful protest. She had protested, indeed, all winter, for that tooth had ached all winter; had never even told her husband of it till yesterday. She had flung herself upon the little crocheted cricket by the sitting-room fire, with her slender, tightly-sleeved arm upon the chintz-covered rocking-chair, and her erect, firm head upon her arm. Into the palm of the other hand the offending cheek crept, like a bird into its nest; with a tender, caressing, nestling movement, as if that tiny hand of hers were the only object in the world to which Guenever did not scorn to say how sorry she was for herself. The color of her cheeks was high but fine. Her eyes—Guenever, as we all know, had brown eyes, more soft than dark—were as dry as they were iridescent. Other women might cry for the toothache! All the curves of the exhausted attitude she had chosen, had in them the bewitching defiance of a hard surrender to a power stronger than herself, with which certain women meet every alien influence, from a needle-prick to a heartbreak. She wore a white apron and a white ribbon against a dress of a soft dark brown color; and the chintz of the happy chair, whose stiff old elbows held her beautiful outline, was of black and gold, with birds of paradise in the pattern. There was a stove, with little sliding doors, in Guenever's sitting-room. Arthur thought it did not use so very much more wood to open the doors, and was far healthier. Secretly he liked to see Guenever in the bird-of-paradise chair, with the moody firelight upon her; but he had never said so—it was not Arthur's “way.” Launcelot, now, for instance, had said something to that effect several times.

Launcelot, as all scholars of romantic fiction know, was the young bricklayer to whom Arthur and Guenever had rented the spare room when the hard times came on—a good-natured, merry, inoffensive lodger as one could ask for, and quite an addition, now and then, before the little sliding doors of the open stove, of a sober evening, when she and Arthur were dull, as Guenever had said. To tell the truth, Arthur was often dull of late, what with being out of work so much and the foot he lamed with a rusty nail. King Arthur, it is unnecessary to add, was a master carpenter.

King Arthur came limping in that evening, and found the beautiful, protesting, yielding

## The True Story of Guenever

figure in the black and golden chair. The Queen did not turn as he came in. One gets so used to one's husband! And the heavy, uneven step he left upon the floor jarred upon her aching nerves. Launcelot, when he had come, about an hour since, to inquire how she was, had bounded down the stairs as merrily as a school-boy, as lightly as a hare, and turned his knightly feet a-tip-toe as he crossed the room to say how sorry he felt for her; to stand beside her in the moody light, to gaze intently down upon her, then to ask why Arthur was not yet at home; to wonder were she lonely; to say he liked the ribbon at her throat; to say he liked a hundred things; to say it quite unmanned him when he saw her suffer; to start as if he would say more to her, and turn as if he would have touched her, and fly as if he dared not, and out into the contending, windy, mad March night. For the wind blew that night! To the last night of her life Queen Guenever will not forget the way it blew!

"Take some Drops," said Arthur. What a calm, prosaic, tiresome manner Arthur had of putting things! Some Drops, indeed! There was nothing Guenever wanted to take. She wanted, in fact, to *be* taken; to be caught and gathered to her husband's safe, broad breast; to be held against his faithful heart; to be fondled and crooned over and cuddled. She would have her aching head imprisoned in his healthy hands. And if he should think to kiss the agonizing cheek, as *she* would kiss a woman's cheek if she loved her and she had the toothache? But Arthur never thought! Men were so dull at things. Only women knew how to take care of one another. Only women knew the infinite fine languages of love. A man was tender when he thought of it, in a blunt, broad way.

There might be men. One judged somewhat from voices; and a tender voice—Heaven forgive her! Though he spoke with the tongues of all angels, and the music of all spheres, and the tenderness of all loves, what was any man's mortal voice to her—a queen, the wife of Arthur, blameless king of men?

The wife of Arthur started from the old chair whereon the birds of paradise seemed in the uneven firelight to be fluttering to and fro. The fine color on her cheeks had deepened painfully, and she lifted her crowned head with a haughty motion towards her husband's face.

"I'm sure I'd try the Drops," repeated Arthur.

"I'll have it out!" snapped Guenever. "I don't believe a word of its being neuralgia. I'll have them all out, despite him!"<sup>1</sup>

Guenever referred to the court dentist.

"I'll have them out and make a fright of myself once for all, and go mumbling round. I doubt if anybody would find it made any difference to anybody how anybody looked."

It cannot be denied that there was a certain remote vagueness in this remark. King Arthur, who was of a metaphysical temperament, sighed. He was sorry for the Queen—so sorry that he went and set the supper-table, to save her from the draughts that lurked even in the royal pantry that mad March night. He loved the Queen—so much that he would have been a happy man to sit in the bird-of-paradise rocking-chair and kiss that flushing, aching, sweet cheek of hers till supper-time tomorrow, if that would help her. But he supposed, if she had the toothache, she wouldn't want to be touched. He knew he shouldn't. So, not knowing what else to do, he just limped royally about and got the supper, like a dear old dull king as he was.

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<sup>1</sup> Guenever's dentist has diagnosed trigeminal neuralgia, a syndrome of paroxysmal excruciating, unilateral facial pain, which was and still is incompletely understood. The prescription of "drops" was either for a mineral-salt based homeopathic remedy or for a painkiller with the same opiate base as the laudanum Launcelot brings her.

If Queen Guenever appreciated this little kingly attention, who can say? She yielded herself with a heavy sigh once more to the arms of the chintz rocking-chair, and ached in silence. Her face throbbed in time to the pulses of the wind. What a wind it was! It seemed to come from immense and awful distances, gathering slow forces as it fled, but fleeing with a compressed, rebellious roar, like quick blood chained within the tissues of a mighty artery, beating to and fro as it rushed to fill the heart of the black and lawless night.

It throbbed so resoundingly against the palace windows that the steps of Launcelot, blending with it, did not strike the Queen’s ears till he stood beside her, in the safe, sweet firelight. Arthur, setting the supper-table, had heard the knightly knock and bidden their friend and lodger enter (as King Arthur bade him always) with radiant, guileless eyes.

Sir Launcelot had a little bottle in his hand. He had been to the druggist’s. There was a druggist to the King just around the corner from the palace.

“It’s laudanum,” said Launcelot. “I got it for your tooth. I wish you’d try it. I couldn’t bear to see you suffer.”

“I’m half afraid to have Guenever take laudanum,” said Arthur, coming up. “It takes such a mite of anything to influence my wife. The doctor says it is her nerves. I know he wouldn’t give her laudanum when her arm was hurt. But it’s just as good in you, Sir Launcelot.”

Guenever thought it very good in him. She lifted her flushed and throbbing face to tell him so; but, in point of fact, she told him nothing. For something in Sir Launcelot’s eyes, the wife of Arthur could not speak.

She motioned him to put the bottle on the shelf, and signified by a slight gesture peculiar to herself—a little motion of the shoulders, as tender as it was imperious—her will that he should leave her.

Now Launcelot, we see, was plainly sorry for Guenever. Was it then a flitting tenderer than sorrow that she had seen within his knightly eyes? Only Guenever will ever know; for Arthur, on his knees upon the crocheted cricket before the palace fire, was toasting graham bread.

Guenever, on her knees before the rocking-chair, sat very still. Her soft brown eyes, wide open, almost touched the cool, smooth chintz where the birds of paradise were flying on a pall-black sky. It seemed to her strained vision, sitting so, that the birds flew from her as she looked at them, and vanished; and that the black sky alone was left. The eyes that watched the golden birds departing were fair and still, like the eyes of children just awake. It was a child’s mouth, as innocent and fair, that Guenever lifted just that minute suddenly to Arthur, with a quick, unqueenly, appealing smile.

“Kiss me, dear?” said Guenever, somewhat disconnectedly.

“Why, yes!” said Arthur.

He wasn’t able to follow the train of thought exactly. It was never clear to him why Guenever should want to be kissed precisely in the *middle* of a slice of toast. And the graham bread was burned. But he kissed the Queen, and they had supper; and he ate the burnt slice himself, and said nothing about it. That, too, was one of Arthur’s “ways.”

“Only,” said Guenever, as the King contentedly finished the last black crust, “I wish the wind would stop.”

“What’s the trouble with the wind?” asked Arthur. “I thought it was well enough.”

“It must be well enough,” said the Queen, and she shook her little white fist at the window. “It *shall* be well enough!”

For the pulse of the wind ran wildly against the palace as Guenever was speaking, and

## The True Story of Guenever

throbbed and bounded and beat, as if the heart of the mad March night would break.

All this was long, long, long ago. How long Guenever can never tell. Days, weeks, months—few or many, swift or slow—of that she cannot answer. Passion takes no count of time; peril marks not hours or minutes; wrong makes its own calendar; and misery has solar systems peculiar to itself. It seemed to her years, it seemed to her hours, according to her tossed, tormented mood.

It is in the nature of all passionate and uncontrolled emotion to prey upon and weaken the forces of reflective power, as much as it is in the nature of controlled emotion to strengthen them. Guenever found in herself a marked instance of this law. It seemed to her sometimes that she knew as little of her own story as she did of that of any erring soul at the world's width from her. It seemed to her that her very memory had yielded in the living of it, like the memory of a person in whose brain insidious disease had begun to fasten itself. So subtle and so sure had been the disease which gnawed at the Queen's heart that she discovered with a helpless terror—not unlike that one might feel in whom a cancerous process had been long and undetected working—that her whole nature was lowering its tone in sympathy with her special weakness. She seemed suddenly to have become, or to feel herself to have become, a poisoned thing.

We may wonder, does not the sense of guilt—not the sensitiveness to, but the *sense* of guilt—come often as a sharp and sudden experience? Queen Guenever, at least, felt stunned by it. Distinctly, as if it and she were alone in the universe, she could mark the awful moment when it came to her. Vivid as a blood-red rocket shot against her stormy sky, that moment whirred and glared before her.

It was a fierce and windy night, like that in which she had the toothache, when she and the King had eaten such a happy supper of burnt toast (for *hers* was burnt, too, although she wouldn't have said so for the world, since the King had got so tired and warm about it). How happy they had been that night! Sir Launcelot did not come again after supper, dimly feeling, despite the laudanum, that the Queen had dismissed him for the evening. She and Arthur had the evening to themselves. It was the first evening they had been alone together for a long time. Arthur sat in the chintz rocking-chair. He held her in his lap. He comforted her poor cheek with his huge, warm hand. His shining, kingly eyes looked down on her like stars from Heaven. He said:

“If it wasn't for your tooth, little woman, how happy we would be.”

And Guenever had laughed and said: “What's a toothache? I'm content, if you are.” And then they laughed together, and the golden birds upon the old chair had seemed to flit and sing before her; and brighter and sweeter, as they watched her, glimmered Arthur's guileless eyes.

The stars were fallen now; the heavens were black; the birds of paradise had flown; the wind was abroad mightily and cold; there was snow upon the ground; and she and Launcelot were fleeing through it and weeping as they fled.

Guenever, at least, was weeping. All the confusion of the miserable states and processes which had led her to this hour had cleared away, murky clouds from a lurid sky. Suddenly, by a revelation awful as some that might shock a soul upon the day of doom, she knew that she was no longer a bewildered or a pitiable, but an evil creature.

A gossip in the street, an old neighbor who used to borrow eggs of her, had spoken in her hearing, as she and Launcelot passed swiftly through the dark, unrecognized, at the corner of the Palace Court, and had said:

“Guenever has fled with Launcelot. The Queen has left the King. All the world will know it by to-morrow.”

These words fell upon the Queen’s ear distinctly. They tolled after her through the bitter air. She fled a few steps, and stopped.

“Launcelot!” she cried, “what have we done? Why are we here? Let me go home! Oh! what have I done?”

She threw out her arms with that tender, imperious gesture of hers—more imperious than tender now—which Launcelot knew so well.

Strange! Oh! strange and horrible! How came it to be thus with her? How came she to be alone with Launcelot in the blinding night? *The Queen fled from the King? Guenever false to Arthur?*

Guenever, pausing in the cruel storm, looked backward at her footsteps in the falling snow. Her look was fixed and frightened as a child’s. Her memory seemed to her like snow of all that must have led her to this hour.

She knew not what had brought her hither, nor the way by which she came. She was a creature awakened from a moral catalepsy. With the blessed impulse of the Prodigal, old as Earth’s error, sweet as Heaven’s forgiveness, she turned and cried: “I repent! I repent! I will go home to my husband, before it is too late!”

“It is too late!” said a bitter voice beside her. “It is too late already for repentance, Guenever.”

Was it Launcelot who spoke, or the deadly wind that shrieked in passing her? Guenever could never say. A sickening terror took possession of her. She felt her very heart grow cold, as she stood and watched her foot-prints, on which the snow was falling wild and fast.

It was a desolate spot in which she and Launcelot stood. They had left the safe, sweet signs of holy human lives and loves behind them. They were quite alone. A wide and windy moor stretched from them to a far forest, on which a horror of great darkness seemed to hang. Behind them, in the deserted distance, gleamed the palace lights. Within these the Queen saw, or fancied that she saw, the shadow of the King, moving sadly to and fro, against the drawn curtain, from behind which the birds of paradise had fled forever.

From palace to wilderness her footsteps lay black in the falling snow. As she gazed, the increasing storm drifted, and here and there they blurred and whitened over and were lost to sight.

So she, too, would whiten over her erring way. Man was not more merciless than Nature.

“I will retrace them all!” cried Guenever.

“You can never retrace the first of them,” said again bitterly beside her Launcelot or the deathly wind. “Man is more merciless than Nature. There is no way back for you to the palace steps. In all the kingdom there is no soul to bid you welcome, should you dare return. The Queen can never come to her throne again.”

“I seek no throne!” wailed Guenever. “I ask for no crown! All I want is to go back and to be clean. I’ll crawl on my knees to the palace, if I may be clean.”

But again said sneeringly to her that voice, which was either of Launcelot or of the wind:

“Too late! too late! too late! You can never be clean! You can never be clean!”

“Launcelot,” said Guenever, rallying sharply and making, as it seemed, a mighty effort to collect control over the emotion which was mastering her—“Launcelot, there is some mistake about this. I never meant to do wrong. I never said I would leave the King. There is some mistake. Perhaps I have been dreaming or have been ill. Let me go home at once to the King!”

## The True Story of Guenever

“There is no mistake,” said once more the voice, which seemed neither of Launcelot nor of the wind, but yet akin to both; “and you are not dreaming and you can never return to the King. The thing that is done is done. Sorrow and longing are dead to help you. Agony and repentance are feeble friends. Neither man nor Nature can wash away a stain.”

“God is more merciful!” cried Guenever, in the tense, shrill voice of agony, stung beyond endurance. It seemed to her that nature could bear no more. It seemed to her that she had never before this moment received so much as an intellectual perception of the guiltiness of guilt. Now mind and heart, soul and body throbbed with the throes of it. She quivered, she struggled, she rebelled with the accumulated fervors and horrors of years of innocence. But it seemed to her as if the soil of sin eat into her like caustic, before whose effects the most compassionate or skillful surgeon is powerless. She writhed with her recoil from it. She shrank from it with terror proportioned to her sense of helplessness and stain.

“They who are only afflicted know nothing of misery!” moaned Guenever. “There *is* no misery but guilt!”

She flung herself down in the storm upon the snow.

“God loves!” cried Guenever. “Christ died! I *will* be clean!”

It seemed then suddenly to the kneeling woman that He whose body and blood were broken for tempted souls appeared to seek her out across the desolated moor. The Man whose stainless lips were first to touch the cup of the Holy Grae which all poor souls should after Him go seeking up and down upon the earth, stood in the pure white snow, and, smiling, spoke to her:

“*Though your sins,*” he said, “*are scarlet, they shall be white.*”

He pointed, as he spoke, across the distance; past the safe, sweet homes of men and women, toward the palace gates. It seemed to Guenever that he spoke again and said:

“Return!”

“Through those black footsteps?” sobbed the Queen, more sad than glad, more frightened than the rest.

But when she looked again, behold! each black and bitter trace was gone. Smooth across them all, fair, pure, still, reposed the stainless snow. She could not find them, though she would. They were blotted out by Nature, as they were forgiven of God. Alas! alas! If man were but half as compassionate or kind. If Arthur—

She groveled on the ground where the sacred feet, which now had vanished from her, stood. Wretched woman that she was! Who should deliver her from this bondage to her life’s great, human, holy love? If Arthur would but open the door for her in the fair distance, where the palace windows shone; if he would take a single step toward her where she kneeled within the wilderness; if he would but loiter toward her where that Other had run swiftly, and speak one word of quiet to her where He had sung her songs of joy! But the palace door was shut. The King took no step toward the wilderness. The King was mute as death and cold as his own white soul. On Arthur’s throne was never more a place for Guenever.

Guenever, within the desert, stretched her arms out blindly across the blotted footprints to the palace lights.

Oh! Arthur. Oh! Arthur, Arthur, *Arthur...*

“Why, Pussy!” said Arthur. “What’s the matter?”

However unqueenly, Pussy was one of the royal pet names.

“My little woman! Guenever! My darling! Why do you call me so?”

Why did she call him indeed? Why call for anything? Why ask or need or long? In his

great arms he held her. To his true breast he folded her. Safe in his love he sheltered her. From the Heaven the stars of his eyes looked down on her. As those may look who wake in Heaven whose anguished soul had thought to wake in Hell, looked Guenever. She was his honored wife. There was no Launcelot, no wilderness. The soul which the King had crowned with his royal love was clean, was clean, was clean!

She hid her scarlet face upon his honest heart and seemed to mutter something about “dreams.” It was all that she could say. There are dreams that are epochs in life.

“But it wasn’t a dream, you see,” said Arthur. “We’ve had a scare over you, Guenever. You took the laudanum, after all.”

“Launcelot’s laudanum! Indeed, no! I took the Drops, as I told you, Arthur.”

“The bottles stood together on the shelf, and you made the blunder,” said Arthur, anxiously. “We think you must have taken a tremendous dose. I’ve sent Launcelot for the Doctor. And Nabby Jones, she was in to borrow eggs, and she said a little camphire would be good for you.<sup>2</sup> She just went home to get it. But I’ve been frightened about you, Guenever,” said Arthur. Arthur spoke in his own grave and repressed manner. But he was very pale. His lips, as the Queen crept, sobbing, up to touch them, trembled.

“Well, well,” he said, “we won’t talk about it now.” Guenever did not want to talk. She wished Nabby Jones would stay away, with her camphire. She wished Launcelot would never come. Upon her husband’s heart she lay. Within her husband’s eyes the safe home fire-light shown. Across the old chintz chair the birds of paradise were fluttering like birds gone wild with joy.

Without, the wind had lulled, the storm had ceased, and through the crevices in the windows had sifted tiny drifts of cool, clean snow.

And this, know all men henceforth by these presents, is the true story of Guenever the Queen.

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<sup>2</sup> Camphire is whitish translucent crystalline volatile substance, belonging chemically to the vegetable oils, and having a bitter aromatic taste and a strong characteristic smell: it is used in pharmacy as a numbing agent and had an early reputation as an antaphrodisiac to counter venereal disease.

## CHAPTER THREE

“I WENT, I SAW, I CONQUERED”: REWRITING THE CHURCH

A Woman's Pulpit  
Saint Caligula  
The Reverend Malachi Matthew



## INTRODUCTION

If the nineteenth-century saw a good deal of tension surrounding increasing secularization of what had been a Puritan theocracy—tensions between science and religion, industrialization and community, capitalism and piety—Elizabeth Stuart Phelps was not the least bit fraught about what she believed. Ann Douglas suggests that increased industrialization caused an economic shift that altered women's place in society that saw them barred from enfranchisement, from professions, including medicine, where they had long been important as midwives, and occupations where they had formerly worked, and increased secularization saw similar disestablishment among the clergy: "By the middle of the nineteenth century the northeastern well-bred woman was 'disestablished' as surely as her clerical peers" (48). Douglas argues that women relied on the qualities that disempowered them (piety, narcissism, timidity, and disdain for competition), which led to consequences we feel today, such as the preoccupation with glamour, melodrama, and consumption. However, many of them found power in their faith as they envisioned a fair economic system, sexual equality and just society. Mark Vasquez notes women's pervasive moral influence as the predominant churchgoers: "converted women were thus empowered as mediators between God and society in ways that men were not" (94). Rona Privett points out that "for women religion had become, in a way, a source of power within women's private sphere" (8).

However, Phelps found empowerment in her faith that she brought to both the private and public spheres. In her memoir, she notes that growing up in a seminary town as the daughter of a theologian only gave her ideologies a solid foundation: "I was taught that God is Love, and that Christ His Son is our Saviour; that the important thing in life was to be that kind of woman for which there is really, I find, no better word than Christian" (55). Given her focus on being both Christian and female, it comes as no surprise that her first renovation of doctrine and dogma comes in the first story in this chapter, "A Woman's Pulpit," a story that uses playfulness and humor to underscore the seriousness of its subject. Further, just as she constructs a female protagonist who follows Antoinette Brown, ordained by the Congregational Church in 1853, into the ministry, Phelps also envisioned other changes in the church. These changes seem grounded in the Social Gospel movement, a movement of religious progressivism that rose up during the Civil War and remained powerful well into the twentieth century. "According to the social gospel," notes Susan Curtis, "every Christian had a dual obligation: to himself and to society. As a result, the Social Gospel provided the foundation for social and political reforms designed to eliminate poverty, disease, filth, and immorality" (2). One of the early leaders of this movement, Reverend Edwards Park, taught at Andover Seminary with Phelps's father and taught her Bible lessons. She writes that during those Tuesday evenings, "we were taught Professor Park's theology" (*Chapters* 67). Social Gospel theology rose up out of the need to affirm the goodness and purpose of life in the face of the tragedy of war. Phelps recognized this need. However, while much of her writing was meant to enact Social Gospel reform (the question driving the movement was "What would Jesus do?"), she also saw that the doctrines and dogma of the church did little that was truly Christian. Like the language of the pulpit, her rhetoric, imbued with warmth and humor, is designed to persuade and reform, and she often offers a sharp critique of the pulpit itself. In the following stories about Jerusha Bangs, Reverend Malachi Matthew, and the young theologian who narrates "Saint Caligula," Phelps asks pointed questions about

traditional and dogmatic concepts, about how we judge others, and about what it means to be Christian.

## THE STORIES

“A Woman’s Pulpit” first appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* 26 (July 1870): 11-22, and was reprinted in *Sealed Orders* (Boston: Houghton, Osgood and Company, 1879: 177-200).

“Saint Caligula” appeared in *The Independent* 5 Dec. 1878: 3-5, and Phelps later included it in *Sealed Orders* (Boston: Houghton, Osgood and Company, 1879).

“The Reverend Malachi Matthew” was published in *The Independent* 30 Nov. 1882: 26-8; it was anthologized in *Fourteen to One* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1896).

## A WOMAN'S PULPIT

I fell to regretting to-day, for the first time in my life, that I am an old maid; for this reason: I have a very serious, long, religious story to tell, and a brisk matrimonial quarrel would have been such a vivacious, succinct, and secular means of introducing it.

But when I said, one day last winter, "I want some change," it was only Mädchen who suggested, "Wait for specie payment."<sup>1</sup>

And when I said, for I felt sentimental, and it was Sunday too, "I will offer myself as a missionary in Boston," I received no more discouraging reply than, "I think I see you! You'd walk in and ask if anything could be done for their souls to-day? And if they said No, you'd turn around and come out!"

And when I urged, "The country heathen requires less courage; I will offer myself in New Vealshire," I was met by no louder lion than the insinuation, "Perhaps I meant to turn Universalist, then?"<sup>2</sup>

"Mädchen!" said I, "you know better!"

"Yes," said Mädchen.

"And you know I could preach as well as anybody!"

"Yes," said Mädchen.

"Well!" said I.

"Well!" said Mädchen.

So that was all that was said about it. For Mädchen is a woman and minds her own business.

It should be borne in mind, that I am a woman "myself, Mr. Copperfull," and that the following correspondence, now for the first time given to the public, was accordingly finished and filed, before Mädchen ever saw or thought of it.<sup>3</sup>

This statement is not at all to the point of my purpose, further than that it may have, as I suppose, some near or remote bearings, movable on springs to demand, upon the business abilities—by which, as nearly as I can make out, is meant the power of holding one's tongue—of the coming woman, and that I am under stress of oath never to allow an opportunity to escape me, of strewing my garments in the way of her distant, royal feet.

"To be sparing," as has been said, "of prefatory, that is to say, of condemnatory remarking," I append at once an accurate vellum copy of the valuable correspondence in question.

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<sup>1</sup> Specie payment is payment in hard cash; the term gained currency during the Panic of 1819, America's first major financial crisis, when banks could no longer give specie payment.

<sup>2</sup> Mädchen refers to the growing Universalist church, which affirms that in the fullness of time all souls will be released from the penalties of sin and restored to God. It grew out of Calvinism in both England and America, and was the centre of a growing controversy in Phelps's lifetime in New England. Universalism was clearly at odds with the Calvinist doctrine of predestination held by the orthodox Congregational church. From very early on the Universalist church allowed women to preach.

<sup>3</sup> In *David Copperfield* (1850) by Charles Dickens (1812-1870), Mrs. Crupp refers to the title character as Mr. Copperfull.

A Woman's Pulpit

HERCULES, February 28, 18—.

SECRETARY OF THE NEW VEALSHIRE HOME MISSIONARY SOCIETY.

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR:—I am desirous of occupying one of your vacant posts of ministerial service: place and time entirely at your disposal. I am not a college graduate, nor have I yet applied for license to preach. I am, however, I believe, the possessor of a fair education, and of some slight experience in usefulness of a kind akin to that which I seek under your auspices, as well as of an interest in the neglected portions of New England, which *ought* to warrant me success in an attempt to serve their religious welfare.

For confirmation of these statements I will refer you, if you like, to the Rev. Dr. Dagon of Dagonville, and to Professor Tacitus of Sparta.

An answer at your earliest convenience, informing me if you are disposed to accept my services, and giving me details of terms and times, will oblige,

Yours respectfully,

J.W. BANGS.

HARMONY, N. V., March 5, 18—.

J.W. BANGS, ESQ.

MY DEAR SIR:—Your lack of collegiate education is an objection to your filling one of our stations, but not an insurmountable one. I like your letter, and am inclined to think favorably of the question of accepting your services. I should probably send you among the Gray Hills, and in March. We pay six dollars a week and “found.” Will this be satisfactory? Let me hear from you again.

Truly yours,

Z.Z. ZANGROW,

*Sect. N.V.H.M.S.*

P.S. I have been too busy as yet to pursue your recommendations, but have no doubt that they are satisfactory.

HERCULES, March 9, 18—.

REV. DR. ZANGROW.

DEAR SIR:—Yours of the 5<sup>th</sup> is at hand. Terms are satisfactory. I neglected to mention in my last that I am a woman. Yours truly,

JERUSHA W. BANGS.

HARMONY, N.V., March 9, 18—.

JERUSHA W. BANGS.

DEAR MADAM:—You have played me an admirable joke. Regret that I have no time to return it.

Yours very sincerely,

Z.Z. ZANGROW, *Sect.*

HERCULES, March 11<sup>th</sup>.

DEAR SIR:—I was never more in earnest in my life.

Yours,

J.W. BANGS.

“I went, I saw, I conquered”: Rewriting the Church

HARMONY, March 14<sup>th</sup>.

DEAR MADAM:—I am sorry to hear it.

Yours,

Z.Z. ZANGROW.

HERCULES, March 15, 18—.

REV. DR. ZANGROW.

MY DEAR SIR:—After begging your pardon for encroaching again upon your time and patience, permit me to inquire if you are not conscious of some slight—we will call it by its mildest possible cognomen— inconsistency in your recent correspondence with me? By your own showing, I am individually and concretely qualified for the business in question; I am generally and abstractly beyond its serious recognition. As an educated American Christian, I am capable, by the word that goeth forth out of my mouth, of saving the Vealshire Mountain soul. As an educated American Christian woman, I am remanded by the piano and the crochet-needle to the Hercules parlor soul.

You will—or you would, if it fell to your lot—send me under the feminine truce flag of “teacher” into Virginia to speak on Sabbath mornings to a promiscuous audience of a thousand negroes: you forbid me to manage a score of White-Mountaineers. Mr. Spurgeon’s famous lady parishioner may preach to a “Sabbath-school class” of seven hundred men: you would deny her the scanty hearing of your mission pulpits.<sup>4</sup>

My dear sir, to crack a hard argument, you have, in the words of Sir William the logical, “mistaken the associations of thought for the connections of existence.”<sup>5</sup> If you will appoint me a brief meeting at your own convenience in your own office in Harmony, I shall not only be very much in debt to your courtesy, but I shall convince you that you ought to send me into New Vealshire.

Meantime I am

Sincerely yours,

J.W. BANGS.

HARMONY, March 18, 18—.

MY DEAR MISS BANGS:—You are probably aware that, while it is not uncommon in the Universalist pulpit to find the female preacher, she is a specimen of humanity quite foreign to Orthodox ecclesiastical society.

I will confess to you, however (since you are determined to have your own way), that I have expressed in our hurried correspondence rather a denominational and professional than an individual opinion.

I can give you fifteen minutes on Tuesday next at twelve o’clock in my office, No. 41 Columbia Street.

It will at least give me pleasure to make your personal acquaintance, whether I am able or not to gratify your enthusiastic and somewhat eccentric request.

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<sup>4</sup> Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892) was a charismatic English Baptist minister who encouraged women to evangelize.

<sup>5</sup> Sir William the logical is Sir William Hamilton (1788-1865), a Scottish philosopher.

## A Woman's Pulpit

I am, my dear madam,  
Cordially yours,  
Z. Z. ZANGROW, *Sect.*

I went, I saw, I conquered. I stayed fifteen minutes, just. I talked twelve of them. The secretary sat and drummed meditatively upon the table for the other three. He was a thin man in a white cravat. Two or three other thin men in white cravats came in as I was about to leave. The secretary whispered to them; they whispered to the secretary: they and the secretary looked at me. Somebody shook his head: somebody else shook his head. The secretary, drumming, smiled. Drumming and smiling, he bowed me out, merely remarking that I should hear from him in the course of a few days.

In the course of a few days I heard from him. I have since acquired a vague suspicion, which did not dawn at the time upon my broadest imagination, that the secretary sent me into New Vealshire as a private, personal, metaphysical speculation upon the woman question, and that the New Vealshire Home Missionary Society would sooner have sent me to heaven.

However that may be, I received from the secretary the following:—

HARMONY, N. V., March 23, 18—.

DEAR MISS BANGS:—I propose to send you as soon as possible to the town of Storm, New Vealshire, to occupy on trial, for a few weeks, a small church long unministered to, nearly extinct. You will be met at the station by a person of the name of Dobbins, with whom I shall make all necessary arrangements for your board and introduction.

When can you go?  
Yours, etc.,  
Z. Z. ZANGROW, *Sect.*

HERCULES, March 24,  
18—.

MY DEAR DR. ZANGROW:—I can go to-morrow.  
Yours, etc.,  
J. W. BANGS.

A telegram from the secretary, however, generously allowed me three days “to pack.” If I had been less kindly entreated at his hands, I should have had nothing to pack but my wounded dignity. I *always* travel in a bag. Did he expect me to preach out a Saratoga trunkful of flounces? I explosively demanded of Mädchen?

“He is a man,” said Mädchen, soothingly, “and he has n’t behaved in the least like one. Don’t be hard upon him.”

I relented so far as to pack a lace collar and an extra paper of hairpins. Mädchen suggested my best bonnet. I am sorry to say that I locked her out of the room.

For the benefit of any of my sex who may feel induced to follow in my footsteps, I will here remark that I packed one dress, Barnes on Matthew, Olshausen on something else, a

Tischendorff Testament, Mädchen’s little English Bible, Jeremy Taylor (Selections), and my rubber boots.<sup>6</sup> Also, that my bag was of the large, square species, which gapes from ear to ear.

“It is n’t here,” said Mädchen, patiently, as I locked the valise.

“Mädchen,” said I, severely, “if you mean my Florentine, I am perfectly aware of it. I am going to preach in black ties,—always!”

“Storm!” said Mädchen, concisely. As that was precisely what I was doing, to the best of my abilities, I regarded Mädchen confusedly, till I saw the Pathfinder on her knees, her elbows on the Pathfinder, and her chin in her hands.<sup>7</sup>

“It is n’t here,” repeated Mädchen, “nor anything nearer to it than Whirlwind. That’s in the eastern part of Connecticut.”

I think the essentially feminine fancy will before this have dwelt upon the fact that the secretary’s letter was not, to say the least of it, opulent in directions for reaching the village of Storm. I do not think mine is an essentially feminine fancy. I am sure this never had occurred to me.

When it comes to Railway Guides, I am not, nor did I ever profess to be, strong-minded. When I trace, never so patiently, the express to Kamtschatka, I am let out of the Himalaya Saturday-night accommodation. If I aim at a morning call in the Himalayas, I am morally sure to be landed on the southern peak of Patagonia. Mädchen, you understand, would leave her card in the Himalayas, if she had to make the mountains when she got there.

So, when Mädchen closed the Pathfinder with a snap of despair, I accepted her fiat without the wildest dream of disputing it, simply remarking that perhaps the conductor would know.

“Undoubtedly,” said Mädchen, with her scientific smile. “Tell him you are going to see Mr. Dobbin of New Vealshire. He cannot fail to set you down at his back door.”

He did, or nearly. If I cannot travel on paper, I can on iron. Although in the Pathfinder’s index I am bewildered, routed, *non est inventus*, “a woman and an idiot,” I can master the *patois* of brakemen and the hearts of conductors with unerring ease.<sup>8</sup> I am sure I don’t know how I got to Storm, and when I got there I was sure I did n’t know how I was to get back again; but the fact remains that I got there. I repeat it with emphasis. I beg especially to call the masculine attention to it. I desire the future historian of “Woman in the Sacred Desk,” as he playfully skims the surface of antiquated opposition to this then long-established phase of civilization, to make a note of it, that there *was* a woman, and she at the disadvantage of a pioneer, who got there.

Before proceeding to a minute account of my clerical history, I should like to observe, for the edification of the curious as well as for the instruction of the imitative, that I labored under

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<sup>6</sup> American theologian Albert Barnes (1798-1870) wrote a series of interpretations of book of the Bible; his *Notes on the New Testament* sold more than a million volumes by 1871. Olshausen is German theologian Hermann Olshausen (1796-1839), who also specialized in New Testament exegesis. The Tischendorff Testament came from German biblical scholar Konstantin von Tischendorf (1815-1874), who discovered the Sinaitic Codex in his search for a manuscript of the New Testament and published an edition of it in 1862. Mädchen’s little English Bible: is likely the King James authorized version of 1611. Jeremy Taylor (1613-1667) was an English clergyman; his selected works were published through the first part of the nineteenth-century.

<sup>7</sup> The Pathfinder was a series of atlases published by Collins.

<sup>8</sup> *non est inventus*: not to be found.

## A Woman's Pulpit

the disadvantage of ministering to two separate and distinct parishes, which it was as impossible to reconcile as hot coals and parched corn. These were the Parish Real and the Parish Ideal. At their first proximity to each other, my ideal parish hopped in the corn-popper of my startled imagination, and, as nearly as I can testify, continued in active motion till the popper was full.

Let us, then, in the first place, briefly consider (you will bear, I am sure, under the circumstances, with my "porochial" style)

### *The Parish Ideal.*

It was "in the wilderness astray," but it abounded in fresh meat and canned vegetables. Its inhabitants were heathen, of a cultivated turn of mind. Its opportunities were infinite, its demands delicately considerate; its temper was amiable, its experience infantine. It numbered a score or so of souls, women and children for the most part; with a few delightful old men, whose white hairs would go down in sorrow to the grave, should they miss, in the afternoon of life, the protecting shade of my ministrations. I collected my flock in some rude tenement,—a barn perhaps, or antiquated school-house,—half exposed to the fury of the elements, wholly picturesque and poetical. Among them, but not of them, at a little table probably, with a tallow candle, I sat and talked, as the brooks run, as the clouds fly, as waves break; smoothly, as befitted a kind of New Vealshire *conversazione*; eloquently, as would Wesley, as would Whitfield, as would Chalmers, Spurgeon, Beecher.<sup>9</sup>

Royally, but modestly, I ruled their stormy hearts. (N.B. No pun intended.) Their rude lives opened, paved with golden glories, to my magic touch. Hearts, which masculine wooing would but have intrenched in their shells of ignorance and sin, bowed, conquered, and chained to their own well-being and the glory of God—or their minister—by my woman's fingers. I lived among them as their idol, and died—for I would die in their service—as their saint. Mädchen might stay at home and make calls. For me, I had found the arena worthy of my possibilities, and solely created for my happiness.

I wish to say just here, that, according to the best information which I can command, there was nothing particularly uncommon, certainly nothing particularly characteristic of my sex, in this mental *pas seul* through which I tripped. I suspect that I was no more interested in myself, and as much interested in my parishioners, as most young clergymen. The Gospel ministry is a very poor business investment, but an excellent intellectual one. Your average pastor must take care of his own horse, dress his daughter in her rich relations' cast-off clothing, and never be able to buy the new Encyclopaedia, as well at the end of twenty years as of two. But he bounds from his recitation-room into a position of unquestioned and unquestionable official authority and public importance, in two months. No other profession offers him this advantage. To be sure, no other profession enfolds the tremendous struggles and triumphs, serving and crowning, of the Christian minister,—a struggle and service which no patent business motive can touch at arm's length; a triumph and crown which it is impossible to estimate by the tests of the bar, the

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<sup>9</sup> John Wesley (1703-1791) was an English evangelist who, with his brother Charles, founded Methodism. George Whitefield (1714-1770) another English evangelist also helped found Methodism. Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847) was a Scottish theologian and minister and founder of the Free Church of Scotland. Lyman Beecher (1775-1863) was an American Presbyterian minister and the father of clergyman Henry Ward Beecher and author Harriet Beecher Stowe, who was Phelps's mentor early in her career.



bench, the lecture-room. But as it is perfectly well known that this magazine is never read on Sundays, and that the introduction of any but “week-day holiness” into it would be the ruin of it, I refrain from pursuing my subject in any of its finer, inner lights, such as you can bear, you know, after church, very comfortably; and have only to bespeak your patience for my delay in introducing you to

*The Parish Real.*

I arrived there on Saturday night, at the end of the day, a ten miles’ stage-ride, and a final patch of crooked railway, in a snow-storm. Somebody who lectures has somewhere described the unique sensations of hunting in a railway station for a “committee” who never saw you, and whom you never saw. He should tell you how I found Mr. Dobbin, for I am sure I cannot. I found myself landed in a snow-drift—I suppose there was a platform under it, but I never got so far—with three other women. The three women had on waterproofs; I had on a waterproof. There were four men and a half, as nearly as I could judge, in slouched hats, to be seen in or about the little crazy station. One man, one of the whole ones, was a ticketed official of some kind; the other two were lounging against the station walls, making a spittoon of my snow-drift; the half-man was standing with his hands in his pockets.

“Was you lookin’ for anybody in partikkelar?” said one of the waterproofs, thoughtfully, or curiously, as I stood dismally regarding the prospect.

“Thank you. Yes. Can you tell me if Mr. Do—”

“obbins,” said the half-man at this juncture, “Bangs?”

“Yes, sir.”

“New parson?”

“Yes, sir.”

“That’s the talk!” said Mr. Dobbins. “Step right round here, ma’am!”

“Right round here,” brought us up against an old buggy sleigh, and an old horse with patient ears. “Hold on a spell,” said Mr. Dobbins, “I’ll put ye in.”

Now Mr. Dobbins was not, as I have intimated, a large man. Whether he were actually a dwarf, or whether he only got so far and stopped, I never satisfactorily discovered. But at all events, I could have “put” Mr. Dobbins into anything twice as comfortably as I could support the reversal of the process; to say nothing of the fact that the ascent of a sleigh is not at most a superhuman undertaking. However, not wishing to wound his feelings, I submitted to the situation, and Mr. Dobbins handed me in and tucked me up, with consummate gallantry. I mention this circumstance, not because I was prepared for, or expected, or demanded, in my ministerial capacity, any peculiar deference to my sex, but because it is indicative of the treatment which, throughout my ministerial experience, I received.

“Comfortable?” asked Mr. Dobbins after a pause, as we turned our faces eastward, towards a lonely landscape of billowy gray and white, and in the jaws of the storm; “‘cause there’s four miles and three quarters of this. Tough for a lady.”

I assured him that I was quite comfortable and that if the weather were tough for a lady, I was too.

“You don’t!” said Mr. Dobbins.

Another pause followed, after which Mr. Dobbins delivered himself of the following:—

“Been at the trade long?”

“Of preaching? Not long.”

## A Woman's Pulpit

"Did n't expect it, you know" (confidentially). "Not such a young un. Never thought on 't."

Not feeling called upon to make any reply to this, I made none, and we braved in silence the great gulps of mountain wind that well nigh swept the buggy sleigh over.

"Nor so good lookin', neither," said Mr. Dobbins, when we had ridden perhaps half a mile.

This was discouraging. A vision of Mädchen scientifically smiling, of the Rev. Dr. Z. Z. Zangrow dubiously drumming, of the New Vealshire Home Missionary Society shaking its head, drifted distinctly by me, in the wild white whirlpool over Mr. Dobbins's hat.

Were my professional prospects to be gnawed at the roots by a dispensation of Providence for which I was, it would be admitted by the most prejudiced, not in the least accountable? Were the Universalist clergywomen never young and "good lookin'?"

I did not ask Mr. Dobbins the question, but his next burst of eloquence struck athwart it thus:—

"Had 'em here in spots, ye see; Spiritoalist and sech. There's them as thinks 't ain't scriptooral in women folks to hev a hand in the business, noway. Then ag'in there's them as feels very like the chap whose wife took to beatin' of him; 'It amuses her, and it don't hurt me.' Howsomever, there's them as jest as lieves go to meetin' as not, when there's nothin' else goin' on. Last one brought her baby, and her husband he sat with his head ag'in the door, and held it."

To these consoling observations Mr. Dobbins added, I believe, but two others in the course of our four miles and three quarters' drive; these were equally cheering:—

"S'pose you know you're ticketed to Samphiry's?"

I was obliged to admit that I had never so much as heard a rumor of the existence of Samphiry.

"Cousin of mine," explained Mr. Dobbins, "on the mother's side. Children got the mumps down to her place. Six on 'em."

It will be readily inferred that Mr. Dobbins dropped me in the drifts about Samphiry's front door in a subdued state of mind. Samphiry greeted me with a sad smile. She was a little yellow woman in a red calico apron. Six children, in various picturesque stages of the disease which Mr. Dobbins had specified, hung about her.

"Law me, child!" said Samphiry, when she had got me in by the fire, taken my dripping hat and cloak, and turned me full in the dying daylight and living firelight. "Why, I don't believe you're two year older than Mary Ann!"

Mary Ann, an overgrown child of perhaps seventeen, in short dresses buttoned up behind, sat with her mouth open, and looked at me during the expression of this encouraging comparison.

I assumed my severest ministerial gravity and silence, but my heart was sinking.

I had salt pork and barley bread for supper, and went to bed in a room where the ice stood on my hair all night, where I wrapped it around my throat as a preventive of diphtheria. I was prepared for hardship, however, and bore these little physical inconveniences bravely; but when one of Mary Ann's brothers, somewhere in the extremely small editions, cried aloud from midnight to five A.M., and Samphiry apologized for the disturbance the next morning on this wise—"Hope you was n't kept awake last night, I'm sure. They generally cry for a night or two before they get through with it. If you'd been a man-minister now, I don't s'pose I should have dared to undertake the keep of you, with mumps in the house; but it's so different with a woman; she's got so much more fellow-feeling for babies; I thought you would n't mind!"—I confess

that my heart dropped “deeper than did ever plummet sound.”<sup>10</sup> For about ten minutes I would rather have been in Hercules making calls than in New Vealshire preaching the Gospel.

I was aroused from this brief state of despair, however, by the remembrance of my now near-approaching professional duties; and after a hot breakfast (of salt pork and barley bread), I retired to my icy room to prepare my mind appropriately for my morning’s discourse.

The storm had bent and broken since early dawn. The sun and the snow winked blindly at each other. The great hills lifted haughty heads out of wraps of ermine and gold. Outlines in black and gray of awful fissures and caverns gaped through the mass of wealthy color which they held. Little shy, soft clouds fled over these, frightened, one thought; now and then a row of ragged black teeth snapped them up; I could see them struggle and sink. Which was the more relentless, the beauty or the power of the sight, it were difficult choosing. But I, preparing to preach my first sermon, and feeling in myself (I hope) the stillness and smallness of the very valley of humiliation, did not try to choose. I could only stand at my window and softly say, “Before the mountains were brought forth, THOU art.”<sup>11</sup>

I do not know whether Mary Ann heard me, but when she appeared at that crisis with my “shaving-water,” and blushed scarlet, transfixed in the middle of the room, with her mouth open, to beg pardon for the mistake, but “she’d got kinder used to it with the last minister, and never thought till she opened the door and see my crinoline on the chair!” I continued, with a gentle enthusiasm:—

“That is a grand sight, my dear, over there. It ought to make one very good, I think, to live in the face of such hills as those.”

“I want to know!” said Mary Ann, coming and gaping over my shoulder. “Why, I get as used to ’em as I do to washing-day!”

I had decided upon extempore preaching as best adapted to the needs of my probable audience, and, with my icy hands in the warm “shaving-water” and my eyes on the icy hills, was doing some rambling thinking about the Lord’s messages and messengers,—a subject which the color and dazzle of the morning had touched highly to my fancy; but wondering, through my slicing of introduction, firstly, secondly, a, b, c, d, and conclusion, if the rural tenement in which we should worship possessed a dinner-bell, or a gong, or anything of that sort, which could be used as summons to assemble, and if it were not quite time to hear the sound, when Mary Ann introduced herself upon the scene again, to signify that Mr. Dobbins awaited my pleasure downstairs. Somewhat confused by this sudden announcement, I seized my Bible and my hat, and presented myself promptly but palpitating.

“Morning,” said Mr. Dobbins, with a pleasant smile. “Rested yet?”

I thanked him, and was quite rested.

“You don’t!” said Mr. Dobbins. “Wal, you see I come over to say that meetin’ ’s gin up for to-day.”

“Given up!”

“Wal, yes. Ye see there’s such a heft of snow, and no paths broke, and seein’ it was a gal as was goin’ to preach, me and the other deacon we thought she’d get her feet wet, or suthin’, and so we ’greed we would n’t ring the bell! Thought ye’d be glad to be let off, after travelin’ all day yesterday, too!”

I looked at Mr. Dobbins. Mr. Dobbins looked at me. There was a pause.

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<sup>10</sup> From *The Tempest* (3.3.25) by William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

<sup>11</sup> Psalms 90.2.

## A Woman's Pulpit

“Will your paths be broken out by night?” I asked, with a terrible effort at self-control.

“Wal, yes. In spots; yes; middlin’ well.”

“Will my audience be afraid of wetting their feet, after the paths are broken?”

“Bless you, no!” said Mr. Dobbins, staring, “they’re used to ’t.”

“Then you will please to appoint an evening service, and ring your bell at half past six precisely. I shall be there, and shall preach, if there is no one but the sexton to hear me. And next Sabbath you will oblige me by proceeding with the regular services, whatever the weather, without the least anxiety for my feet.”

“If you was n’t a minister, I should say you was spunky,” said Mr. Dobbins, thoughtfully. He regarded me for some moments with disturbed interest, blindly suspicious that somebody was offended, but whether pastor or parishioner he could not make out. He was still undecided, when he took to his hat, and I to my “own sweet thoughts.”

This incident vitally affected my programme for the day. It was harrowing, but it was stimulative. There was the inspiration of the rack about it. The *animus* of the stake was upon me.<sup>12</sup> I could die, but I would not surrender. I would gain the respect of my parishioners, whether—well, yes—whether I gained their souls or not; I am not ashamed to say it now, partly because of the true, single gnawing hunger for usefulness for usefulness’ sake, and for higher than usefulness’ sake, which came to me afterwards, and which, you remember, is all left out for the Sunday magazines, partly because the acquisition of my people’s respect was a necessary antecedent to that of their salvation.

So by help of a fire which I cajoled from Samphiry, and the shaving-water which was warmer than the fire, I contrived to employ the remainder of the Sabbath in putting my first sermon upon paper.

The bell rang, as I had directed, at half past six. It did not occur to me at the time that it sounded less like a dinner-gong than a church-bell of average size and respectability. I and my sermon were both quite ready for it, and I tramped off bravely (in my rubber boots), with Mary Ann as my guide, through the drifted and drifting paths. Once more, for the benefit of my sex, I may be permitted to mention that I wore a very plain street suit of black, *no crimps*, a white collar of linen, and a black tie; and that I retained my outside garment—a loose sack—in the pulpit.<sup>13</sup>

“Here we are,” said Mary Ann, as I floundered up half blinded from the depths of a three-foot drift. Here we were indeed. If Mary Ann had not been with me I should have sat down in the drift, and—no, I do not think I should have cried, but I should have gasped a little. *Why* I should have been horribly unprepared for the sight of a commodious white church, with a steeple, and a belfry and stone steps, and people going up the steps in the latest frill and the stove-pipe hat, the reader who had ever tried to patronize an American seamstress, or give orders to an American servant, or asked an American mechanic if he sees a newspaper, must explain. The citizens of Storm might be heathen, but they were Yankees; what more could be said? Sentence a Yankee into the Desert of Sahara for life, and out of the “sandwiches there” he would contrive means to live like “other folks.”

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<sup>12</sup> In this case, the *animus* is the spirit or temper of the thing, rather than the soul of person.

<sup>13</sup> There were no crimps, or curls, in her hair. “Sack” is the term used in the period for a cloak-like outer garment, usually with a hood.

However, I did not sit down in the drift, but went on, with meeting-house and worshipers all in an unnatural light like stereoscopic figures, and sat down in the pulpit; a course of conduct which had at least one advantage—it saved me a cold.

Mr. Dobbins, it should be noted, met me at the church door, and conducted me, with much respect, up the pulpit stairs. When he left me, I removed my hat and intrenched my beating heart behind a hymn-book.

It will be understood that, while I was not unpracticed in Sabbath-school teaching, mission prayer-meeting exhortation, “remarks” at sewing-schools, and other like avenues of religious influence, of the kind considered suitable for my sex, I had never engaged in anything which could be denominated public speech; and that, when the clear clang of the bell hushed suddenly, and the pause on the faces of my audience—there may have been forty of them—warned me that my hour had come, I was in no wise more ready to meet it than any Miss A, B, or C, who would be content to employ life in making sofa-pillows, but would be quite safe from putting it to the *outré* purpose of making sermons.

So I got through my introductory exercises with a grim desperation, and made haste to my sermon. Once with the manuscript in my hands, I drew breath. Once having looked my audience fairly in the eye, I was prepared to conquer or be conquered by it. There should be no half-way work between us. So I held up my head and did my best.

The criticism of that sermon would be, I suspect, a choice morning’s work for any professor of homiletics in the country. Its divisions were numerous and startling; its introduction occurred just where I thought it would sound best, and its conclusion was adjusted to the clock. I reasoned of righteousness and judgment to come, in learned phrase. Theology and metaphysics, exegesis and zoölogy, poetry and botany, were impressed liberally into its pages. I quoted Sir William Hamilton, Strauss, Aristotle, in liberal allowance.<sup>14</sup> I toyed with the names of Schleiermacher and Copernicus.<sup>15</sup> I played battledoor and shuttlecock with “views” of Hegel and Hobbes.<sup>16</sup> As nearly as I can recollect, that sermon was a hash of literature in five syllables, with a seasoning of astronomy and Adam.

I had the satisfaction of knowing, when I read as modestly, reverently, and as much like an unanointed church-member as I knew how, a biblical benediction, and sat down again on the pulpit cushions, that if I had not preached the Gospel, I had at least subdued the church-going population of Storm.

Certain rough-looking fellows, upon whom I had had my eye since they came in,—there were several of them, grimy and glum, with keen eyes; men who read Tom Paine, you would

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<sup>14</sup> Hamilton (1788-1856) was a Scottish philosopher and civil historian who was widely influential in the period. David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1874) was a German theologian who wrote a controversial but influential life of Christ, translated by George Eliot in 1846. Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322 BC), like Hamilton and Strauss, wrote metaphysical philosophies that are likely the basis of Jerusha’s sermon.

<sup>15</sup> Friedrich Ernst Schleiermacher (1768-1834) was a German theologian and philosopher; Nicolas Copernicus (1473-1543) was the Polish astronomer who founded modern astronomy.

<sup>16</sup> Battledoor and shuttlecock are the playing components for badminton, called today the racquet and bird. Georg Wilhelm Hegel (1770-1831) was the last of the German idealist philosophers; Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) was an English political philosopher.

## A Woman's Pulpit

say, and had come in "to see the fun,"—while I must admit that they neither wept nor prayed, left the house in a respectful, stupid way that was encouraging.<sup>17</sup>

"You gin it to us!" said Mr. Dobbins, enthusiastically. "Folks is all upsot about ye. That there was an eloquent discourse, marm. Why, they don't see but ye know jest as much as if ye was n't a woman!"

And when I touched Mary Ann upon the shoulder to bring her home, I found her sitting motionless, not quite strangled stiff. She had made such a cavern of her mouth, during my impassioned peroration, that an irreligious boy somewhere within good aim had snapped an India-rubber ball into it, which had unfortunately stuck.

Before night, I had reason to feel assured from many sources that I had "made a hit" in my corner of New Vealshire. But before night I had locked myself into the cool and dark, and said, as was said of the Charge of the Six Hundred: "It is magnificent; but it is not war!"<sup>18</sup>

But this is where the Sunday part of my story comes in again, so it is of no consequence to us. Suffice it to say that I immediately appointed a little prayer-meeting, very much after the manner of the ideal service, for the following Wednesday night, in the school-house, with a little table, and a tallow candle, too. The night was clear, and the room packed. The men who read Tom Paine were there. There were some old people present who lived out of walking distance of the church. There were a few young mothers with very quiet children. I succeeded in partially ventilating the room, and chanced on a couple of familiar hymns. It needed only a quiet voice to fill and command the quiet place. I felt very much like a woman, quite enough like a lady, a little, I hope, like a Christian too. Like the old Greek sages, I "was not in haste to speak; I said only that which I had resolved to say." The people listened to me, and prayed as if they felt the better for it. My meeting was full of success and my heart of hope.

Arrived at this point in my narrative, I feel myself in strong sympathy with the famous historian of Old Mother Morey. For, when "my story's just begun," why, "now my story's done."<sup>19</sup>

"Ce n'est pas la victoire, mais le combat," which is as suitable for autobiographical material, as to "make the happiness of noble hearts."

From the time of that little Wednesday-evening meeting my life in Storm was a triumph and a joy, in all the better meanings that triumph and joy can hold. My people respected me first and loved me afterwards. I taught them a little, and they taught me a great deal. I brightened a few weeks of their dulled, drowsy, dejected life: they will gild years of mine.

I desire especially to record that all sense of personal embarrassment and incongruity to the work rapidly left me. My people at once never remembered and never forgot that I was a

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<sup>17</sup> Tom Paine was the philosopher of the American Revolution, Thomas Paine (1737-1809) was born in England.

<sup>18</sup> During the Crimean War (1854-1856), confused orders led to six hundred cavalry charging a Russian artillery where over three-quarters of them died. Tennyson popularized the event in "The Charge of the Light Brigade" (1854). French general Pierre Bosquet said, "It is magnificent, but it is not war" in response to the event.

<sup>19</sup> This is from "Old Mother Morey," a nursery rhyme that Jerusha quotes almost in its entirety.

woman. The rudest of the readers of the “Age of Reason” tipped his hat to me, and read “Ecce Homo” to gratify me, and after that, the Gospel of John to gratify himself.<sup>20</sup>

Every Sabbath morning I read a plain-spoken but carefully written sermon, which cost me perhaps three days of brain-labor. Every Sabbath afternoon I talked of this and that, according to the weather and the audience. Every Wednesday night I sat in the school-house, behind the little table and the tallow candle, with the old people and the young mothers, and the hush, and the familiar hymns, and lines of hungry faces down before me that made my heart ache at one look and bound at the next. It used to seem to me that the mountains had rather starved than fed them. They were pinched, compressed, shut-down, shut-in faces. All their possibilities and developments of evil were those of the dwarf, not of the giant. They were like the poor little Chinese monsters, molded from birth in pitchers and vases; all the crevices and contortions of life they filled, stupidly. Whether it was because, as Mary Ann said, they “got as used to the mountains as they did to washing-day,” and the process of blunting to one grandeur dulled them to all others, I can only conjecture; but of this my New Vealshire experience convinced me: the temptations to evil of the city of Paris will bear no comparison to those of the grandest solitude that God ever made. It is in repression, not in extension, that the danger of disease lies to an immortal life. No risks equal those of ignorance. Daniel Webster may or may not escape the moral shipwrecks of life, but what chance has an idiot beside him?<sup>21</sup>

“It’s enough to make a man wish he’d been born a horse in a treadmill and done with it!” said Happen to me one day. Happen was a poor fellow on whom I made my first “parish call”; and I made a great many between Sunday and Sunday. He lived five miles out of the village, at the end of an inexpressible mountain road, in a gully which lifted a pinched, purple face to the great Harmonia Range. I made, with difficulty, a riding-skirt out of my waterproof, and three miles an hour out of Mr. Dobbins’s horse, and got to him.

The road crawled up a hill into his little low broken shanty, and there stopped. Here he had “farmed it, man and boy,” till the smoke of Virginia battles puffed over the hills into his straightforward brown young eyes.

“So I up and into it, marm, two years on’t tough; then back again to my hoe and my wife and my baby, to say nothing of the old lady,—you see her through the door there, bedridden this dozen year,—and never a grain of salt too much for our porridge, I can tell ye, when one day I’m out to cut and chop, ten mile deep in the furrest,—alon’ too,—and first I know I’m hit and down with the trunk of a great hickory lyin’ smash! along this here leg. Suffer? Well; it was a day and a half before they found me; and another half day afore the nighest doctor, you see, over to East Storm. Well, mebbe he did his best by me, but mebbe he did n’t know no more how to set a bone nor you do. He vowed there was n’t no fracture there. Fracture! it was a jelly before his eyes. So he ties it up and leaves a tumbler of suthin’, and off. Mortified? Yes. Been here ever since—on this sofy—yes. Likely to be here—bless you, yes! My wife she tends the farm and the baby and the old lady and me. Sometimes we have two meals a day and again we don’t. When you come to think as your nighest neighbor’s five mile off, and that in winter-time,—why, I can see, a lookin from my sofy, six feet of snow drifted across that there road to town,—and nought but one woman in gunshot of you, able to stir for you if you starve; why, you feel,

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<sup>20</sup> *The Age of Reason* (1795) was one of Paine’s major works. “Ecce Homo,” behold the man, is a phrase from Pontius Pilate’s speech in John 19.5.

<sup>21</sup> Daniel Webster (1782-1852) was an orator and statesman, who tended to support established institutions throughout his career in American politics, including slavery.

## A Woman's Pulpit

sometimes, now, marm, beggin' your pardon, you feel like hell! There's summer-folks in their kerridges comes riding by to see them hills,—and kind enough to me some of 'em is, I'll say that for 'em,—and I hear 'em chatterin' among themselves, about 'the grand sight!' says they. 'The d—d sight,' says I; for I lie on my sofy and look over their heads, marm, at things they never see,—lines and bars like over Harmonia red-hot and criss-cross like prison grates. Which comes mebbe of layin' and lookin' so long, and fanciful. They say I'd stand a chance to the hospital to New York or Boston, mebbe. I hain't gin it up yet. I've hopes to go and try my luck some day. But I suppose it costs a sight. And my wife, she's set her heart on the leg's coming to of itself, and so we hang along. Sometimes folks send me down books and magazines and such like. I got short o'reading this winter and read the Bible through; every word, from 'In the beginning' to 'Amen.' It's quite a pretty little story-book, too. True? I don't know about that. Most stories set up to be true. I s'pose if I was a parson, and a woman into the bargain, I should think so."

Among my other parochial discoveries I learned one day, to my exceeding surprise, that Samphiry—who had been reticent on her family affairs—was the widow of one of my predecessors. She had married him when she was young and pretty, and he was young and ambitious,—“Fond of his book, my dear,” she said, as if she had been talking of some dead child, “but slow in speech, like Aaron of old. And three hundred and fifty dollars was tight living for a family like ours. And his heart ran out, and his people, and maybe his sermons, too. So the salary kept a-dropping off, twenty-five dollars at a time, and he could n't take a newspaper, besides selling the library mostly for doctor's bills. And so he grew old and sick and took to farming here, without the salary, and baptized babies and prayed with sick folks free and willing, and never bore anybody a grudge. So he died year before last, and half the valley turned out to bury him. But that did n't help it any, and I know you'd never guess me to be a minister's widow, as well as you do, my dear. I'm all washed out and flattened in. And I can't educate my children, one of them. If you'll believe it, I don't know enough to tell when they talk bad grammar half the time, and I'd about as lieves they'd eat with their knives as not. If they get anything to eat, it's all I've got heart to care. I've got an aunt down in Massachusetts, but it's such a piece of work to get there. So I suppose we shall live and die here, and I don't know but it's just as well.”

What a life it was! I felt so young, so crude, so blessed and bewildered beside it, that I gave out that night, at evening prayers, and asked Samphiry to “lead” for herself and me. But I felt no older, no more finished, no less blessed or bewildered, when she had done so.

I should not neglect to mention that I conducted several funerals while I was in Storm. I did not know how, but I knew how to be sorry, which seemed to answer the same purpose; at least they sought me out for the object from far and near. On one occasion I was visited by a distant neighbor, with the request that I would bury his wife. I happened to know that the dead woman had been once a member of the Methodist church in East Storm, whose pastor was alive, active, and a man.

“Would it not be more suitable,” I therefore suggested, “at least more agreeable to the feelings of Brother Hand, if you were to ask him to conduct either the whole or a part of the service?”

“Waal, ye see, marm,” urged the widower, “the cops was partikelar sot on hevin' you, and as long as I promised her afore she drawed her last that you should conduct the business, I think we'd better perceed without any reference to Brother Hand. I've been thinking of it over, and I come to the conclusion that he could n't take offense *on so slight on occasion!*”



“I went, I saw, I conquered”: Rewriting the Church

I had ministered “on trial” to the people of Storm, undisturbed by Rev. Dr. Zangrow, who, I suspect, was in private communication of some sort with Mr. Dobbins, for a month,—a month of pouting, spring weather, and long, lazy walks for thinking, and brisk, bright ones for doing; of growing quite fond of salt pork and barley bread; of calling on old, bedridden women, and hunting up neglected girls, and keeping one eye on my Tom Paine friends; of preaching and practicing, of hoping and doubting, of struggling and succeeding, of finding my heart and hands and head as full as life could hold; of feeling that there was a place for me in the earnest world, and that I was in my place; of feeling thankful every day and hour that my womanhood and my work had hit and fitted; of a great many other things which I have agreed not to mention here,—when, one day the stage brought me a letter which ran:—

HERCULES, April 28, 18—.

MY DEAR:—I have the measles.

MÄDCHEN.

Did ever a woman try to do anything, that some of the children did not have the measles?

I felt that fate was stronger than I. I bowed my head submissively, and packed my valise shockingly. Some of the people came in a little knot that night to say good by. The woman cried and the men shook hands hard. It was very pleasant and very heartbreaking. I felt a dismal foreboding that, once in the clutches of Hercules and Mädchen, I should never see their dull, dear faces again. I left my sorrow and my Jeremy Taylor for Happen, and my rubber boots for Samphiry. I tucked the lace collar and the spare paper of hairpins into Mary Ann’s upper drawer. I begged Mr. Dobbins’s acceptance of Barnes on Matthew, with the request that he would start a Sunday school.

In the gray of the early morning the patient horse trotted me over, with lightened valise and heavy heart, to the crazy station. When I turned my head for a farewell look at my parish, the awful hills were crossed with Happen’s red-hot bars, and Mary Ann, with her mouth open, stood in her mother’s crumbling door.

## SAINT CALIGULA

The first time I saw Caligula, I remember, my cigars had given out.<sup>1</sup>

I was, it is needless to add, a smoker; Caligula was a member of a Baptist church. I was in the combative phase of experience; Caligula was in the acquiescent. I was, perhaps I may venture to say, of a speculative nature; Caligula of an incurious one. I was twenty six; Caligula was sixty-two. I was reading “Hopkins on Original Sin”; Caligula was blacking my boots. I was a junior in the Theological School of Harmouth University; Caligula was the divinity sweep. I was white; Caligula was black.<sup>2</sup>

To say that Caligula and I had never met before, would be inaccurate. I believe I had been in Harmouth ten days. Ten times, therefore, I must infer that Caligula had been a visitor in No. 2, West Depravity Hall. Ten times he must have stepped in slippers sanctity of foot across my smoke-beclouded threshold. Ten times he must have dusted those lyrics of Heine into the waste-basket, and put the English Bible conspicuously on top of the meerschaum. Ten times he must have essayed to produce order in that awful bedroom, out of which I got with the utmost possible speed every morning, thinking it the discreeter part of valor not to look behind. Ten times—yes, it must be he who had ten times washed the soap-dish and forgotten to dry it; ten times made unparadonable dust with that particular kind of a broom, patented, for university purposes, which can’t go into corners, but leaves a circular mark to show how clean the middle of the room is. He it was, then, who had ten times blacked my ungrateful boots; but until this day I mention I am not quite sure that I had even bestowed upon Caligula any such share of my valuable mental processes as could be philosophically called attention.

That day—it was Friday, and rained—I put my amber mounted pipe upon the askew little thin red cloth of the unsteady library table (one of the fellows had whittled a leg short), and, without raising my eyes from “Hopkins,” said leisurely:

“Oh! Here, if you please. I want an errand done down-town.”

“Yes, Mist’ Hub.”

“My name is Hubbard,” I said, putting down the book. “I wonder, by the way, what yours is.”

“I didn’t supposed you’d done forgot, Mist’ Hub,” said the negro, gently.

I closed the book and regarded him.

“Why, Caligula! Is this you?”

“Yes, Mist’ Hub.”

“You were round senior year, in college, a week or so. Somewhere the end of the term, wasn’t it?”

“I had you three month, Mist’ Hub,” said Caligula, slowly. “I tought you’d done remembered. You was very good to me. I had you ole weskits, Mist’ Hub; an’ de neckties you trew in. I didn’t supposed you’d done forgot, sar.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The more famous Caligula was Roman Emperor Gaius Julius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, who was commonly called Caligula. He reigned from 37-41 C.E. and is often described as an insane tyrant.

<sup>2</sup> Hubbard is likely reading a work by theologian Ezekiel Hopkins ((1634-1690), *The Doctrine of the Two Covenants, wherein the Nature of Original Sin is at Large Explained* (1712).

<sup>3</sup> Caligula means Hubbard’s castoff waistcoats, or vests.

I have said that this was the first time I saw Caligula. The visual power of a student in Harmouth College (not too much restricted in income, let us say, and not of an unpopular temperament) during the last three months of senior year is a more or less limited faculty. Could it be expected to focus distinctly upon a Negro sweep of temporary history and unobtrusive habits?

My “Original Sin” dropped with a resounding thwack upon the floor. Caligula picked it up. He stood bowing and cringing. I looked at him silently. A little man, gray, spare, bent, bald, black as the French boots which stood shining upon the pine shelf somebody (was it he, perhaps?) had obligingly put up for them behind the bedroom door. A little, obsequious, uninteresting man, of an enslaved nature, I thought, flattering myself upon the judicial nicety of my perceptions; a creature without even the crude conditions of heroism, of romance, of poetry, which now and then attach to select specimens of his rudimentary race. Gentle, perhaps, with the grotesque sarcasm of that name of his to upset all possible gravity in one’s appreciation of the fact; gentle, silent, and commonplace. Oh! yes, and clean. Caligula was tolerably clean, and his forehead was heavily lined. He wore small round earrings too. Next time I should know Caligula. He “wouldn’t supposed I done forgot” again. My cheeks burned at the gentlemanly rebuke.

“I stand corrected, Caligula,” I said. “You have better manners than I. Come and shake hands. But I don’t know why you should remember me out of so many fellows.”

“It was the weskits partly, Mist’ Hub,” said Caligula, thoughtfully. “But, ye see, some de young men dey yank a man’s earrings—an’ old man’s earrings,” added Caligula, with dignity—“dat a doctor said would cure me of weak eyes, sar. You neber tetched ’em, Mist’ Hub.”

“Glad if I didn’t, Caligula!” said I, hastily thinking what a narrow escape it was, if I hadn’t. “But you needn’t have been at any trouble to remember the waistcoats. And now I remember that you used to get tobacco for me before. I want some cigars for Dobbins’s.”

“Yes, sar. I know. I remember de sort I done used to got for you at Dobbins’s. I’ll go at once, sar,” said Caligula, gravely. He did not approve of smoking. He gave it up when he was immersed, and he always used to say: “I’ll go at once, sar.” I began to recall these incidents in Caligula’s history.

Caligula turned, as he went out that day, standing in the doorway, through which (I had front corner, ground floor) I could see the wet graveled walk and the rain beating the infirm October grass.

“Dar’s one reason, sar, I remember you, Mist’ Hub. When Mari come home wid de wash”—

“Mari?”

“Mari is my wife, sar. I tought you’d done remember Mari. She washed for you for two years, sar, Mari.”

“Caligula,” said I, decidedly, “I have been in Germany for two years, studying biology.”

“Sar?”

“And when a man studies biology in Germany for so long a time, Caligula, it is difficult for him to keep all his American acquaintances as distinctly in mind as he would like. Don’t you see? Biology preoccupies the memory to a curious extent.”

“Yes, Mist’ Hub.” A look of awe stole over Caligula’s humble, listening face.

“But, really I think, Caligula—yes, I do think that I remember Mari. Short, wasn’t she?”

“Tall, sar. Mari is tall of her size and well put togeder.”

“Yes, I mean—rather tall. Just tall enough to be good-looking, and somewhat slim?”

## Saint Caligula

“She’s pretty stout,” said Caligula, patiently; “pretty stout of her weight, an’ lighter complected than I, sar. She’s handsome to see, Mari. An’ she had one twenty-five a dozen for starched, sar; she did up so well.”

“Now I am *sure* I remember her,” I continued, enthusiastically. “A handsome woman, stout and short—”

“Tall, sar.”

“Stout and tall I mean, who asked one twenty-five for starched things. I remember perfectly. An admirable woman. But what was it I did about Mari, Caligula?”

“Some de young men chaff at her,” said Caligula, with reviving spirit, “seein’ she was a washwoman and—black. Dar was some rooms she would n’t go nigh, sar. She’s sperited in her feelin’s, Mari. She used to send me to their rooms. Mist’ Hub, I tank you, sar. *You* treat my wife like a lady.” Caligula drew himself up. He had put on his hat; but took it off again, and bowed gravely to me, standing in the rain, before he shut the door.

Some of the fellows were in when Caligula came back with cigars. I nodded at him kindly, with a vague sense of gaining experience in the pastoral work. I said, “Did you get very wet, Caligula?” with that unconscious condescension we fall into, especially in the presence of witnesses, toward a person to whom we have been kind. I think I had some idea of asking further questions about Mari, with the purpose of drawing him out, for the entertainment of my visitors. But the sweep checked my advances with an indefinable reticence and dignity of manner. I let him go, in silence. It suddenly seemed to me that he was rather an old man to be going out in the rain to get cigars for us.

We were preparing for a debate in our Seminary Literary Society that week—the fellows and I. I remember that I had the affirmative on the question, “Is it desirable to have a Celibate Clergy?”

“I hope your wife is well,” I said one morning to Caligula. I spoke with something of a society air in my anxiety, newly acquired, to avoid the twang of patronage. Indeed, I think I put the question rather gayly, like a man exchanging the compliments of a New Year’s call.

Caligula was cleaning my coat. He had the ammonia bottle, and with assiduous, cramped finger was rubbing the spot spattered by the turtle soup at dinner. He did not immediately answer me. When he did, he said:—

“Powerful strong ammony, sar, dis yere.” He lifted his eyes—the melancholy eyes of his race. I found myself unexpectedly face to face with an old man’s difficult and impressive tears.

“She’s well, sar; yes. Mari is well, tank God. She’s peart an’ well. An’ so’s de chillen. They’re powerful peart chillen, sar.”

“I have some washing, if she wants it,” I said, with the irrelevance of perplexity.

“Tank you, sar. She don’t take in now.”

“Why, what’s the matter?”

It takes the bluntness and the boldness of youth (and I had both) to ask such questions. Caligula put down the ammonia bottle and slowly folded the coat before he said:

“Mist’ Hub, sar, Mari’s out with me.”

“*Out* with you, Caligula?”

“She’s been out with me, sar, dis two years. She’s powerful sperited woman, Mari. Mist’ Hub, sar, my wife hain’t spoke to me for two whole years.”

He bowed as he said this, crouching a little. It is not easy to put into words the effect the motion had upon me; as if the creature must apologize to another for his very sorrows. I was young and a theological student. I knew little about sorrow. But I felt to the bottom of my

untaught, untried heart that I was in the presence of a profound affliction. Biology offered no assistance for such emergencies. “Original Sin” gave me no suggestion. I ran over the main points in my paper on the “Celibate Clergy,” without avail. In simple desperation, I said:

“Caligula, I beg your pardon.”

“Thank you, sar,” said Caligula. He was at work more on the turtle spot, rubbing meekly, with bent, bald head. As he rubbed his earrings shook.

“I did not know you had domestic troubles. I did not mean to intrude upon them by—by careless questions.”

“No, sar. Thank you, sar.”

There was a silence.

“You’d been kind to her, of course, Caligula?” I ventured, breaking it at last.

“I tried to be, Mist’ Hub,” said Caligula, gently. “She’s a powerful sperited woman, Mari,” he added, slowly. “She can’t stand much. We disagreed, sar, ’bout de doctrine of Immersion. Mari took to the ’Piscopals, to St. John’s. A powerful aristocratical church, St. John’s, Mist’ Hub; s’ported mainly by head waiters an’ barbers, sar. Mari an’ me, we disagreed on Immersion an’ ’Postolical Succession. I tried to be kind to her; but she hain’t spoke to me for two years. I don’t wish to find no fault with Mari; but its hard, someways, to git ’long, sar. She won’t take in nor go out, sar, to earn nothing. Nor yet she won’t cook, sar, an’ tend up at home. She hain’t lifted a finger to do for me for nigh two years, sar. She do for de chillen, sar; but she neber do for me.”

“But do you support, do you take care of her, under the circumstances, Caligula?”

“Sartainly, sar. She has a claim upon me for s’port. She’s my wife. She has de legal claim. I s’ports ’em all, sar, de same as if Immersion hadn’t come between us. It comes a mite hard; but I don’t wish to find no fault with Mari.”

“You’re too good to her!” I said, hotly.

Caligula lifted his head. “She is my wife, sar,” he answered, simply.

“You’re too good to her, all the same, Caligula.”

“So she says, Mist’ Hub. It’s that she’s most high sperited about. She says it makes her heaps ob trubble in the way of gitten’ the divose.”

“Divorce! Does she want a divorce?”

“Yes, Mist’ Hub, sar. She’s been tryin’ for de divose dis year while past. Mebbe she’ll git it, sar, de lawyer done says. I’d be sorry,” said Caligula, sighing. “But de Lord understan’s de matter. He’s de best lawyer I know, sar. You see, Mist’ Hub, sar, I’ve sorter put de case in his han’s. He knows Mari. He must kinder see what a powerful fine woman she is, settin’ ’Postolical Succession out the account, and them high sperits he giv’ her. A handsome woman, too,” pursued the sweep, straightening. His eye flashed with marital pride; but across his dark and heavy jaw there passed the pinched look peculiar to those species of animals who suffer without outcry.

I did not understand the expression, being, as I say, but twenty-six. But I understood that I did not understand it, and sat before Caligula awed and silent. Who was I, that I should comfort, instruct, or edify my Negro sweep? Love? I had thought myself in love once or twice, in summer vacations; when the moon was on the river; when the twilight touched the sea; when the wind blew soft hair against my face; when the scent of flowers was strong; when people in parlors sang love songs without the lamps; when it was not incumbent to reduce one’s visions of domestic life upon a rural clerical income to the coherence of an immediate engagement.

## Saint Caligula

The black brute, it seemed, could love a woman, in his own way. Well, what a way it was.

Christianity? I had chosen the sacred profession, whose peculiar precinct it is to define for other men their duty to God and man; to inspect their motives; to judge their conduct; to prescribe their principles; to be their leader through the subtle perils and delicate intoxications of a spiritual consecration.

Suppose I prated of resignation, of self-denial, of purity, of integrity to this negro Baptist, building my fire there, crouched, patient, kneeling on the seminary floor! I!—

I looked at the man with a peculiar interest, I remember, as if I had never seen a Christian before; as if I had discovered the type of character. My heart said: “Caligula, teach *me*.”

I was still young enough not to ask for the other side of a story that appealed to my sympathies; and it was not until I happened to lunch one day with Mari’s lawyer—a professor in the Harmouth Law School, I regret to be obliged to say—that it occurred to me what a shock it would be to discover in my St. Caligula some ordinary domestic tyrant, of uncertain habits, temper, or purse-strings, from whom the protective marriage laws of the parental state would be richly justified in freeing that handsome, high-spirited, but long-suffering female, Mari.

I measured my escape by my sensations when Burrage said, carelessly:—

“You have a phenomenon up at Depravity Hall, in the shape of your sweep; one of the best husbands I ever knew in my life. Eh? Oh! yes, the divorce. I think I shall be able to get the woman the divorce from him. Should have got it last year if he’s neglected her or showed temper. She’ll make it incompatibility, I think—under the present laws. Curious case. The worse she acts the better he treats her. He’s hard pushed, poor chap. Very curious case. Why, confound it! the fellow seems to love the woman! *Says he promised to, when they got married!*”

Having neither experience nor wisdom with which to help Caligula, I offered him the only trifles at my command—money and reverence. He accepted both, without remarks. He seemed to be suffering from an attack of dumb gratitude. But next week he appeared with a new broom. I am not versed in the natural history of brooms; but I suppose this to have been rectangular in shape, for the corners of my bedroom were clean from that day forevermore.

Being very much occupied about this time with my debate on the celibate clergy, with the lectures on Predestination, some Hebrew roots on which I had “got sat down” in the class-room, and a few other matters of importance, I think, as nearly as I can recall, that I had little or no conversation with Caligula for several weeks.

One day he hung about, after his work was done, with that pitiable bow. I was reading Baur on the “Fourth Gospel,” I remember. Caligula seemed at a large remove from the argument. I was tense with zeal for the honor of the tender evangel, and the affairs of this colored brother seemed unimportant beside the literary history of the disciple whom Jesus loved.

Caligula said: “Busy, Mist’ Hub?”

“Why, yes, Caligula; rather, just now. Anything wanted?”

“No, sar; tank you, sar.”

He moved away. His hands came together at the lean finger-tips with a submissive motion.

“Caligula! Come back!”

“Yes, sar; tank you, sar.”

“You had something to say to me. What troubles you? What has Mari done now?”

“Nothing, sar, of no great consequence; but the divose.”

“Oh! The divorce.”

“She done got the divose, sar—she an’ de chillen. I didn’t s’posed she’d done get a divose for de chillen. She’s took ’em with her, sar. She’s gone to Tennysee, Mari has. Dey’s all gone, sar. I’m lef’ to myself, sar; tank you, sar. I thought I’d give you information of the fac’. That’s all . . . Mist’ Hub, the pail needs fillin’ fresh. I call the water turned a mite sour. I will fill it. I’ll go at once, sar.”

I was too much of a novice in human experience to be equable in my treatment of human confidence, and remember to have suffered many keen alternations of feeling about Caligula; but from this time I think he advanced upon my interest with sad and steady inroads. I did not call in the fellows to see him now. I could not, somehow. Caligula did not converse much with the rest; or, if he did, it was on a superficial plane, carefully confined to the area of blacking, brooms, and coal, of soap or towels, of the weather or the wages. There was a senior opposite—the ablest man in the seminary, and reported to be of a singularly spiritual nature, interested in the higher life. But Caligula had never mentioned Mari to this good man. As I thought more about it, I became at first awed, then humbled, by the confidence of the sweep.

I remember saying, one day:

“Caligula, I’m a young fellow, and can’t understand your troubles, I know. But I’d like to have you know I’m downright sorry for them and for you! I hope Mari is ashamed of herself before now!”

Caligula lifted his melancholy eyes to answer me: but spoke with difficulty, bringing out his patient “Tank you, sar,” without his usual distinctness.

“I’d take it kindly, Mist’ Hub,” he added, “bein’ you’ve been so good, sar, if you’d speak regardfully of my wife. Don’t s’pose she done understood how lonesome it would make it, gettin’ de divose for de chillen too. She was sech a handsome woman,” sighing, “and so high sperited. I don’t sweep up no grudgin’ feelin’s against my wife.”

It was the second term of middle year. The examinations on Federal Headship in Adam were past. The snow had melted from the University Green; the ice was breaking on the Harmouth River; great freshets were gathering their forces. Our seminary windows stood open. Caligula’s coal fires burned low. The Professor had got along as far as Justification by Faith. Sparrows twittered in the bare seminary elms. Spring was coming.

So, it seemed, was Caligula, with a definite haste in his shuffling step. I heard it far down the stairs that day, and listened idly over the notes on Eternal Punishment and the Natural Man.

The year had come and gone, leaving Caligula as it found him—a patient, melancholy man, with slavish inborn manners and grand acquired Christian eyes. Caligula had ceased to talk of his domestic afflictions. He honored me by a silent assumption of my sympathy.

This day I have in mind, he presented a remarkable, though perfectly indefinable appearance. We call it transfiguration in white people. He came directly to my side, and said:

“Mist’ Hub, sar, I done got a letter from her. I got a letter from my wife.”

“She is not your wife!” I exclaimed, thoughtlessly. I was angry for Caligula. I do not know but I was angry with him. I should have relished a touch of masculine temper in this long-suffering and long-loving creature. Caligula waved away my words with a gesture of much dignity.

“She writes to say, sar—”

“What business has she to write to you at all?”

“It is in reply,” said Caligula, with a good deal of manner. “I wrote de fust letter. Dis is in reply.”

## Saint Caligula

“Oh! you’ve been writing to her, have you?”

It is as unsafe, we find, for a superior nature to assume that it has absorbed the confidence of the inferior as it would be to establish an elective affinity between the “walrus and the carpenter” (with whose attempt to walk “hand in hand” a contemporary humorist has made us all familiar).<sup>4</sup>

What else had Caligula done, pray, which he had not condescended to communicate to me?

“I wrote to her,” pursued Caligula, with increasing independence, in a tone which, however, lost none of its gentle and appealing character. “I wrote that I had ’bout made up my mine, sar, to go to housekeepin’ again. I’d live alone too long. I should marry somebody, sar, as de law allow, an’ go to keepin’ house dis yere season. So I told her I’d give her de fust chance.”

“Hem! You did, did you?”

“Yes, sar. I didn’t cringe to her, sar. She’s high-sperited herself. I jest told her, in a high-sperited way, how it was. She could do jest as she done pleased. But I told her I’d give her de fust chance.”

“And what—under these unusual circumstances—did the lady say?”

“She say she’d come, and be tankful, sar. But I must send a hundred and fifty dollars to get her and de chillen on from Nashville.”

“It is a large sum, Caligula.”

“A large sum, sar,” repeated Caligula, cheerfully. “But she says she’s done glad to get home again and behave like a lady, sar. She says she’s had a very dull time in Nashville, sar. I expect she would,” added Caligula, modestly.

Justification by faith was struggling with the natural man in this model husband at that moment. Anybody but St. Caligula would have said: “I told her so!”

“And how,” I asked, submissively, “do you expect to raise one hundred and fifty dollars, Caligula?”

“The Lord will provide!” said Caligula, religiously. ‘I’ve laid up a trifle—jest a trifle, sar—sence she got de divose. I laid up against things took a turn in dis direction, sar. I neber wanted to marry no other woman. Mari was my wife. I expect she done come back to me. I ain’t gwine to let a matter like a hunderd and fifty dollars come between me an’ my wife, sar.”

Caligula stood confidingly—child-like, serene and sweet. But out of the dark mirror of his face, as out of the Claude Lorraine, illuminated landscapes, looked and blinded me. The Negro sweep was a radiant creature.

I yielded the case without a murmur. We took up a subscription in Depravity Hall. The theological professor himself subscribed five dollars, at the close of his famous lecture on Imputed Sin. The exegetical chair was generous. The homiletic department kindly headed a paper. Several of the fellows put down a Sunday’s preaching. One of them was supplying a mission pulpit at two dollars and seventy-five cents a Sabbath. In three days I had made up the amount necessary to reinstate Caligula in the perils and the pleasures of domestic life. He requested me to write the letter which should explain to the absent fair the profound mysteries of money orders, railway routes, the divorce laws, and his own unconditional forgiveness and unswerving attachment, especially urging me to “make it cl’ar ’bout de money an’ de feelin’s” involved in the complicated case. Humbly I did my best in both particulars; adding, I must

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<sup>4</sup>A reference to Lewis Carroll’s “The Walrus and the Carpenter,” which was published in 1872 in *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*.



confess, one or two pungent suggestions in postscript form and on my personal responsibility, which Caligula did not see, but I am glad to remember that Mari did.

I sent the letter. And the freshets came; and the coal-fires died quite out; and the elms began to breathe; and the class got their three-months' license; and the Greek department had us all to tea, six at a time; and the spring budded and burst. And one afternoon Caligula walked in, at an unwonted hour, and said:

“I've had a telegram from my wife. She'd like to have me meet her an' de chillen at Forty-second Street Station, in New York, to-morrow. I'll go at once, sar.”

Two days after, as I stood plaintively blacking my own boots and thoughtfully wondering how Caligula managed to get the sheet on the bed so it would turn over the blanket, my sweep reappeared. He had on a new pair of earrings, very bright. He wore fresh kid gloves that had ripped across the thumb. He held his gray head loftily. He said:

“Mist' Hub, sar, we'd take it very kind, me an' Mari, if you'd step over to de house this evening, sar, and read the service, sar. We're gwine to be married again, Mari an' me. Dar's de Baptis' minister *could* do it. But I told Mari to have the aristocratical clergyman to St. John's, if she done want him. But, Mist' Hub, sar, she say she take it very kind if you would condescend to come yourself, and no sectarian diffunces to be considered on dis yere peaceful and glorious occasion.”

## THE REVEREND MALACHI MATTHEW: OUR THANKSGIVING STORY

One chilly November day, toward five o'clock in the afternoon, a crowd of people poured from the First Church of Pepperville. The deacons were all out; the Sewing Society was there in force; the Dorcas Relief was thoroughly represented; the Town Missionaries were every one of them present; the Sunday-school teachers were on the ground almost *en masse*; the officers of the Ancient and Honorable Experiment for the Suppression of Intemperance were, to a man and a woman, on the spot; scarcely a church member in good and regular standing could be found who had absented himself from this occasion. In fact, sundry persons of doubtful, if irregular, standing in the First Church—not to mention a sprinkling of the world's people—including two reporters, a horse-jockey, one editor, some mill-girls out on a strike, a down-town bar-keeper, and a drunkard, were in the meeting-house that afternoon.

It was a white meeting-house with green blinds. The blinds were taken off in the Winter, to save the paint. This economical process being under way, but as yet incomplete at the time we refer to, the church presented to the irreverent somewhat the aspect of the historic personage well known to the nursery, who appeared in public with "one shoe off and one shoe on." In fact, the youngest son of the oldest deacon had disgraced himself and the family by distinctly singing, on a high key, outside the graveyard windows, in full hearing of the audience, this very refrain, with the classic addition about my son John, with which we are all familiar.

There were two air-tight stoves in the meeting-house, with black funnels, as long and as narrow as theology, running the length of the building. There were fires in both these stoves. All the windows were closed. The double windows, however, as if to furnish the casuistical mind with, at least, one proof of the benevolence of the Creator, were not yet on. Ventilators, the First Church would have you understand, were not in vogue when the First Church was built. It had yet to be learned that the apostles used ventilators, or that the early Fathers were dependent upon oxygen. Nothing so fresh as fresh air need be expected of Pepperville First Church and Society. We were conservative and cautious. If carbonic acid gas was good enough for our sainted ancestors, it was good enough for us. If they raised Christians on it, why could not we?

Besides, the senior deacon had to wear a skull-cap, as it was; two of the pillars were bald, but wouldn't own it; the super intendent's wife was of what is known in Pepperville as "a chilly disposition," and the heaviest pew-owner kept his own domestic thermometer at 82°.

The exercises in the church on this November day (it was a Tuesday of which I speak) had begun at nine o'clock in the morning. There had been an interval of an hour for a cold collation in the vestry, between twelve and one. The "performance" (as the bar-tender called it, but was corrected by the horse-jockey, who preferred *circus*) had begun again at one. For seven mortal hours all Pepperville, in its best clothes, had sat between those two air-tights, anxious, intent, intense. It was now five o'clock, and Pepperville was let loose.

There were the young men, the very young men, the boys, awkwardly adorning the long flight of wooden steps which they gazed at sadly, as he who was prevented by force of public opinion from whittling them. There were the young men comparing keen, alert young impressions; nodding sharply; laughing, not always pleasantly; receptive as moss is to a northeaster; growing as silently as the young oak; the future fathers of the great Church or future victims of the great world, swarming in and out of Pepperville meeting-house in business hours, as who hath a President to elect, or a felon to try, or a race to see.

There were women, oh! the women! grave and gay, saint and sinner, maid and matron, black silk and alpaca, in groups, in twos, alone, manned and manless, chattering, silent, whispering, tearful, giggling, stern. O my sisters, to whom the sweetness and light of the earth are intrusted, what monster or what marvel came ye out for to see, that ye sit seven hours idle here on ironing-day?

There were the pillars—Heaven guide the pillars!—the solid, tax-paying, anxious brethren, with the furrowed brows, with the bent shoulders, with the respectable overcoats, with the whole Denomination at their backs, not to say at their heels. They came next; they walked decorously and spoke under breath, as at a funeral; they conversed confidentially with the important men who constituted the rearguard of this agitated army.

These important men were strangers chiefly, the guests of Pepperville and of the First Church; better-looking than the deacons, better-dressed than the pillars, used better grammar than the members; clearly an imported article, but clerical, wholly. This rearguard composed a familiar and fearful body known in ecclesiastical communities as a “counsel,” a “consul,” a “caounsl,” or even as a council.

This Council, which had met (on ironing-day, as might have been expected of the sex) to honor Pepperville by its presence and advice, at five o’clock that afternoon presented a grave appearance.

Its brow was dark, its eyes were bright, its lips compressed, its voice severe. Now and then it slipped up on the life-long ministerial habit of joking, and forgot itself; but for the most part it remembered itself very well, and comported itself with the gloom which was evidently felt to hang over the occasion.

It discoursed plaintively, in low tones, as it joggled slowly down the aisle behind the dispersing crowd. Occasionally it wiped a furtive eye. Sometimes it clenched a sacred hand. Whether it was a council in affliction or a council on the war-path was a question which a neutral observer would have not been able immediately to decide; but that it was no common council, met under no common circumstances, was not to be doubted.

Slowly out of the First Church, down between the air-tights, out of the red-hot audience-room, through the draughty, wheezy little entry, down the wooden steps, out of the carbonic acid gas into the fresh air, wriggled all Pepperville as best it might,—the maids, the matrons, the youths, the deacons, the pillars, the rumseller, the reporter, the horse-jockey, the mill-girls, and the drunkard; and the Council solemnly bringing up their rear,—as if to guide a flock of steers that had been driven into a narrow street, got frightened by a dog, and were jumping fences. As the crowd reached the air, the hum of voices rose to something intense. Pepperville was in subdued hysterics.

At a wide distance from the gesticulating, arguing, angry crowd, far behind the Council, far behind the deacons, and out of the way of everybody, there stole silently down the fast-darkening aisle the object of this mad excitement.

It was a tall, young man; a very young man. His hair was light and long; his arm was long and lank; he stooped; his best coat was shiny on seams. He was very pale and had a scared look. He walked weakly and tottered once or twice.

He was (or would have been) the Reverend Malachi Matthew.

He was the pastor (non-elect) of the First Church in Pepperville. The poor young man was not “sound.” The Council had refused to ordain him.

As he crawled feeling his way down the aisle, a woman crept out of one of the pews. It was now almost dark where she sat. She was a little woman. She wore a black alpaca suit and straw bonnet, and a pair of new kid gloves, too large for hands plainly unused to them. She was a very gentle, rather a pretty little woman, and she crept up to him with a silent gesture of comfort.

“Well, Mary?” said the poor young man.

“Never mind, dear,” said Mary.

She put her arm through his and closed her two hands together over it.

“I had to be honest, Mary. I couldn’t help it. Could I?”

“I didn’t understand it all,” sobbed Mary; “but I am sure you were right.”

Both were thinking what neither dared to say, as they walked, a little set apart from the others, down the broad aisle together, through the gathering gloom of the fast-emptying church. What next?

Three years in the academy, four at college, two teaching school, three in the seminary; all he had, long since gone; all he could borrow well nigh taken; every nerve of soul and body strained to hold out till the first call; in debt and in doubt and in disgrace. What next?

Married just out of college, when they thought he would teach a high school for life; drawn by the morbid New England conscience into the ministry “from a sense of Christian duty”, fighting his way with a wife and three babies about him, inch by inch through the theological school: counting the months, adjusting the days to a dime’s expenses more or less, till he should be a man again and free to go to work—for this; for *this!*

They had lived it all over in the space of time it took them to crawl down that broad aisle from the pulpit platform to the wheezy entry—those years in the little tenements, such as were reserved for the washwomen and the poor students in the Seminary town; where he studied with cotton in his ears, to deaden the sound of the baby’s crying; when they went without meats and fires and flannels and doctors and books, and when he preached in mission churches for two dollars and a half a Sunday once in a while; those years when they had planned and contrived and given each other slow drops of precious courage, and hungered and shivered and sickened and never despaired—“for Christ’s sake,” they called it; to “preach the Gospel,” they used to say—those years when they had sat together spending over and again the first quarter’s salary from “their parish” that was to be; so much, first, for the debt; so much for an encyclopædia; this for a coat for him to preach in; that for a Winter cloak for her to hear him in, since it would never do for a minister’s wife to wear the blanket shawl; that, perhaps, for a baby-carriage, to save her strength. Oh! those years.

And now, what next?

They only clung to each other; there was nothing to say. Once he patted her hand in the dark, when it closed about his shaking arm.

Pepperville, on the church-steps and out in the keen November air, surged to and fro.

Poor little Mr. Malachi Matthew had doubts as to the final and eternal disposition of the impenitent, immediately upon the incident of death. He had been man enough to say so. For seven mortal hours this modest young fellow, who desired to preach the Gospel of Christ, had been badgered and cross-questioned, with his whole history of self-denial behind him and professional ruin before him, his wife watching him from the front pew, his babies and his creditors awaiting him. He had been raked fore and aft by all the doctrines that had a lodgement in all the heads of all the Council,—Predestination, Justification, Foreknowledge Absolute, Total Depravity, the Trinity, Vicarious Atonement, Verbal and Plenary Inspiration, Regeneration,

Sanctification, and Botheration,—and he had come out of them all like a scholar and a Puritan, with a clear head, good sense, and the calm, dogmatic assurance to which he had been trained.<sup>1</sup> Some of the questions which were asked him were of interest as ecclesiastical curiosities: “Did the Son exist co-ordinate with and yet subordinate to the Father?” “Were the three Persons in the Trinity separate as qualities, or as natures?” “Was the first sin of a child an infinite fact requiring an infinite punishment and involving an infinite atonement?” “Did an impenitent person ever pray?” “Could a man become regenerate without waiting for the compelling action of the Holy Spirit?” “Were the audience in Pepperville First Church responsible for the guilt of Adam?”

So far the candidate triumphantly remained, hopping about in the theological sieve. Up to that point they could not strain him through. He was well versed in all these important particulars. He had the tongue of the ready. So far as these vital matters went, he was fully qualified to preach the Gospel of the Nazarene. Nobody put to him any less burning questions. Nobody asked him for his views on the great modern theories about pauperism or intemperance. No one wanted to know how he thought a Christian minister ought to treat a beggar, or cure a drunkard, or save a castaway.

Not one of these pious and learned gentlemen had inquired what he would do with a young forger; how he would manage a tempted girl; how he would handle a dissipated boy; how he would inculcate purity among little children; how he would treat a pardoned prisoner; what were his views on the relation of working-people to their employers; how he would amuse the young people of his parish on Winter evenings; how he should treat spiritualism, politics, the great charities, the refining arts, and domestic duties in his pulpit.

At length, as the subject of Eschatology comes last on the theological betting-list, poor young Mr. Malachi Matthew reached the point where he missed his “Reverend” and his parish, and where Pepperville began to surge. Did the candidate believe in the doctrine of an Everlasting Punishment? Did he explicitly hold that the impenitent are damned at death, without further or second probation, and that opportunity for salvation ends with this life?

The candidate gazed at the lynx-eyed Council, glanced at the breathless audience (his first people, who had chosen and loved him), looked once at his wife, thought of his babies, thought of his creditors—hesitated for the space of one of those conflicts an instant broad, but deep as eternity, in which young preachers have sold their souls—then manfully held up his head, and, in a modest but distinct voice, said he did not know.

Then the hounds were let loose upon him. This was at eleven o’clock in the morning. From midday till twilight the keener heresy-hunters, in a Council famed for its Orthodoxy, chased the poor fellow hither and yon. He would not lie. He really did not know. He felt it to be possible that the limits of the Almighty’s loving kindness might exceed the wisdom of even the soundest theological education. He experienced doubt as to his own fitness at his present age and stage of training, to pass final judgment upon a matter of such fundamental gravity and one upon which the wise and devout were at present more than usually in divergence of opinion. He even admitted that he thought it possible that death did not finally damn every unready, sinful soul that appeared before its Eternal Father for judgment. He had a formula of his own poor fellow, by which he had expected to give ecclesiastical satisfaction; but they muddled it all out of him or rolled it away from under him, like the mule on which we hang horse-thieves in our good

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<sup>1</sup>Total Depravity is the belief that, because of the Fall of Man, mankind is enslaved to sin. Verbal and Plenary Inspiration refer to the Bible’s infallibility, as they involve the belief that the Bible was divinely inspired.

Western States, and so left him to his professional death. He met it quietly—neither hedged, nor equivocated, nor retracted; and the Council dissolved, leaving him branded as a heretic, without a pulpit, and the First Church in an uproar without a pastor.

Now, it so chanced that nothing worse than this, short of eternal damnation itself, could well have happened to Pepperville First Church and Society. Their last pastor, a man beloved by many and respected by all, had resigned, accused of unsoundness by a faction of the parish. For two years before he left them, Pepperville had been torn from end to end by the Nature of—I think it was Predestination. For two years thereafter the parish had been pastorless, searching the ecclesiastical battle-field for a talented, eloquent, healthy, married, *sound* man, anxious to preach the Gospel on a small salary, not requiring a year in Europe to start off on, capable of originating a revival the first Winter, and filling the house on stormy Sundays. These requirements, even to the revival, had been so well met, during his candidacy, by Mr. Malachi Matthew that the people had found themselves already zealously, even affectionately inclined to their chosen pastor. Therefore, Pepperville had received a blow. Therefore, Pepperville surged, as I say.

“The laxity of the present day presents many subtle devices,” observed the oldest member of the Council. He wore a huge collar and white choker, into which he sank, after he had spoke, with the air of a man who said: “My sacred office! Respect it, and do not hit me as hard as you would a secular man.”

“It seems to me, Dr. Croaker,” said one of the younger brethren, crushing on his soft felt hat, and feeling with rather a worldly air for the ends of his mustache—“it seemed to me the man was more muddled than anything else. I suppose we all have our little private reservations. These things have to be taken for substance of doctrine. It’s a bad mess, anyhow.”

“If he had only paid more attention, Brother Smart, to my question about the nature of duration,” chimed in earnestly an honest, plain brother, from a rural parish, “it seemed to me he could have extricated himself. There was a nice psychological point there. I tried to help him. He wouldn’t see it. I was sorry for him.”

“It is better as it is, Brother Hearty,” said Dr. Croaker. “It is time that we made a stand—made a stand. The young man represents a fatal weakness in our modern theology. There *must be some examples made*. It might as well be he as another. God’s word is not to be trifled with.”

“It struck me,” interposed one of the Society (a brisk manufacturer, who rented a front pew, but did not “profess”)—“it struck me that was precisely what Mr. Matthew thought. As nearly as the profane mind could grasp what you were up to, he claimed that the Bible left so much room for a difference of opinion on this point that it was not business-like to play too sharp a game with the text. That’s what I took him to mean.”

“Sir,” said Dr. Croaker, solemnly, “I am sorry for the disappointment of the First Church; but you may thank the Lord that you have been warned in time. Great danger would have threatened your youth if such laxity were allowed to creep into the sheepfold, under the very banner of the Shepherd.” He sheltered himself under his choker and turned ponderously away.

“Calls that argument, does he? Humph!” said the manufacturer to the prosperous retail grocer, who was walking sadly by his side.

“Never saw a shepherd with a banner myself,” said the grocer; “but perhaps he has. There’s no telling what that stock and dickey are capable of. Now, we’ve got to begin this row all over again. Four years more of it, eh? There won’t be any too much piety left in this parish by the time we get a man.”

“It is very strange,” the oldest deacon was saying to the youngest minister. “The young man has preached for us nearly a year, off and on. We never discovered in him any such

unsoundness of views as you have. If he held such reprehensible doctrines—as it is plain he does, I suppose—he never preached ’em in *this* pulpit. It’s all noos to us. It’s a great pity; for we’re in a demoralized condition, spiritooally and financially. I don’t know what in—”the deacon recollected himself in time, drew himself up sharply, and severely said—“what in the world is going to become of us?”

By this time the shriller voices of the women became audible.

“I do declare, I’m awful sorry for his wife.”

“Well, if she’s married a heretic, she’d better have read her Bible where it says about being yoked to unbelievers.”

“She’s kind of pretty. Two rows of something would have improved that alpaca.”

“Yes; we’d have fixed her up after they came. She might have had one of Jordan & Marsh’s ready-made suits at a darnation party.”

This profane suggestion came from a dressy young girl, whose eyes brimmed with something for which Pepperville gave scanty overflow room.

“Well, she split one of her gloves. I saw it—across the thumb.”

“She did it wringing her hands together, under her overskirt, out of sight, after she saw it was going against him.”

“Is that so? How do you know?”

“I saw her. My! how pale he was. It’s a shame.”

“It seems to *me* as if he’d played a kind of game on us, not allowing that he was so unsound all this while.”

“He’s never preached one damnation sermon since he came, come to think of it.”

“That was our look-out,” interposed the dressy young lady. “If we wanted damnation, we ought to have put it in the bargain. A little more hell-fire, sir, or another candidate.”

“Mary Eliza!” said a matron, sternly, “if you were pious yourself, you would not swear like that. It’s very unladylike, besides.”

“I put it to anybody if that isn’t the upshot of it?” said Mary Eliza. “There’s Jim. Ask him.”

The young fellow who approached, laying down his cigar and doffing his hat, looked rather earnestly—for a young fellow—at the pretty girl.

“Miss Mary, can you make out what they *want* it to be true for? I can’t.”

“They take on about it as if they did; that’s a fact,” said Mary Eliza. “One would think—if it could be made out any other way—they’d be glad of it. But,” more softly, “it’s too much for us, Jim. May *be* true, for all we know. Why, yes, I don’t know but I’ll walk a little way. I must get home to supper. How’s your pony, Jim? What was it she had? Blind stages, or whooping cough? I forget.”

“And he did set so agreeable on this parish!” continued the matron who had rebuked Mary Eliza. “His sermon on affliction I never heard the beat of. It was a beautiful discourse. Mis’ Penny and old Mis’ Drowsy, they cried most through the whole of it. There’s few young men could have had such testimony to their labors. And Mary Eliza’s youngest sister has taken an interest ever since he’s been here. For my part, I liked him first-rate and I always had *supposed* we were LED. But it seems we wasn’t.”

“I liked him myself,” courageously uprose another voice, the feeling plainly creeping, like a slow tide, in favor of the rejected heretic. “He had such a way with him. He’s the first minister we’ve had here my Tom would look at. He said he liked his stories, and he said the

chap was honest. It was disrespectful to Tom; but he did—he called him a chap! You know boys will be”—

“I don’t see that he was any such terrible sight of a heretic, after all. Do you, Miss Teazer?”

“Why, no,” plaintively from Miss Teazer, a maiden lady, with perplexed eyes and assured mouth. “Why, no. He didn’t say everybody would be saved. Did he? It was only heathen and— let me see—heathen, idiots—and what was the other?”

“Women, perhaps,” suggested Mary Eliza, lingering to laugh back across her pretty shoulder.

“I don’t think it was women,” said Miss Teazer, with an air of great mental acumen. Somebody suggested “babies.” Mary Eliza observed that it was all the same. The chatter uprose again more vehemently, if not more coherently.

“After the tea-fights and coffee-scrapes and candy-pulls *and* the sacred tableaux, us women have gone through to raise his salary to nine hundred dollars, for my part, I think a lot of men hadn’t ought to sit and vote our minister away from us. Now, I s’pose we’ve got it all to do over again. My doctor’s forbid me ever taking a table again. Jenny says she wishes Rebecca at the Well had never been born. She caught her bronchitis out of the lemonade, you know.”

“Oh! Mrs. Banner, have you heard about the fight in the Reform Club?”

“Why, I heard they’d fit; but, there, I’ve been so busy getting ready for this Consul, I haven’t been able to ’tend up to the Reform Club very well.”

“Nor I haven’t, either. I heard Job Jacobs had broken.”

“So did I; but he was out to-day. It’s a shame.”

“So it is. They need a lot of looking after. I wish we had more time. Oh! Miss Teaser, I believe Molly McGilp is in your class. Can you tell me the facts about that story, you know, that’s going the rounds about her? I said I wouldn’t believe it till I knew it, you know.”

“I haven’t seen Molly, lately,” said Miss Teaser. “She was n’t at Sunday-school, and we have been so extremely busy. You know we entertained *two* clergymen at our house. There was a good deal of cake to bake, and I always make the sausages myself for such occasions. We sent something to the church, too. It has been a very busy season. I hope I haven’t neglected Molly. I shall hunt her up this week.”

“How long do you suppose this eternal punishment lasts, anyway?”

“There’s Mr. Bowker. Let’s ask him. Men know things.”

“Well, I don’t know. Seems to me they didn’t know any too much to-day. Mr. Matthew lost his breath when they asked him if he would send a Five Points thief to Heaven.”

“Is that *so*?”

“Yes, ’n I thought *she* would faint when they tripped him up so on Gohenna and that Greek word. But I guess she ain’t the fainting kind. Thank you, Mr. Bowker. It is rather a heavy shawl. We were just going to ask you how long eternal punishment *really* lasts. We thought you’d know.”

As Mr. and Mrs. Malachi Matthew came out of the church, looking about them timidly, they found themselves close upon a little group which seemed almost as set apart as they were, from the members of Pepperville First Church and the Reverend Council presiding over its Orthodoxy on that unfortunate day.

This group was composed of a few mill-girls, the rumseller, the drunkard, and the horse-jockey, who were all in excellent spirits. One of the reporters stood not far off, writing on the top of his hat. The editor lingered behind the Reverend Mr. Smart and Mr. Hearty, and looked



back nodding, not unkindly, at the heretic minister. After a moment's hesitation, this gentleman came back and shook hands with the disgraced man, and said he would be glad of a digest of his views for *The Watch-Tower of Zion*; but that he was late to his train and must hasten away. This attracted the attention of Brother Hearty to the forlorn position of the two poor young people, and he turned to speak to them. One or two women of the parish, conspicuously Mrs. Drowsy, who found such comfort in weeping over the sermon on Affliction, also made as if they would address the beloved pastor, who had taught them such deadly doctrine for a year without their knowing it. But some one was before them all. It was a well-dressed, self-possessed man, with a large gold watch-guard and a large, cold eye. He tipped his hat to the young preacher and intimated that he had a word to say to him.

“Are you in concern, my brother?” asked Mr. Malachi Matthew, flushing a little with pleasure at this appeal.

“Why, no,” said the man, “it's no concern of mine. That's a fact. It's *your* concern, I know. All I'm after is just to say I like your grit.”

“Thank you, my friend,” said the minister, a little embarrassed.

“I ain't your friend. Don't you mistake. I ain't pious. I sell rum. I don't drink myself. It's a nasty habit. Keeps you poor. I never drink. But I sell. I sell to Job Jacobs here. I'll own it. It's ruined him. He went to hear you one spell. Give me the cold shoulder for a month. I was glad of it. Job and me was boys together, and I wouldn't mind if you did sober Job. But what I come to say is, I like your pluck. I heard you preach that temperance discourse of yours. It cost me several customers—for a time; but I liked it. You attend to your business. I 'tend to mine. According to your views, I'm one of them that'll go to the place they haul you up for knowing nothin' about it, never having had a personal experience; but I can't help that. May be such a place for aught I say. I shouldn't wonder. I ain't pious, but I like your grit.”

“Like 'em myself,” said the drunkard, solemnly. He stood beside the rumseller in a friendly manner.

“Oh, Job!” said Mr. Malachi Matthew, “do I see you intoxicated again? And in church too?”

“Come to hear 'em pitch in ter yer,” said Job. “Sorry yer goin'. Giv' yer my 'and. Club's busted. Reform if yer stay.”

“Come, come, Job,” said the rumseller, a little abashed; for a crowd was gathering. He put his arm through Job's and they walked unsteadily away. Mr. and Mrs. Malachi Matthew looked sadly after them; but Brother Hearty came up, and some of the sisters, and the two young people shook hands with them, and exchanged a few confused words. They were very tired and wished to be alone. They looked about, still timidly, and walked as if uncertain of their next step.

The horse-jockey lingered behind, with the mill-girls; more especially with one mill-girl, who wore a red feather and bead trimming. One of the others said:

“Molly McGilp, Bob wants you.”

“I want to know!” said Molly. A little stir while they stood there attracted their attention. One of the Sunday-school teachers, a conscientious girl, was collecting the infant-class in the vestry for half an hour's rehearsal for the Christmas concert. They met on Tuesdays, just before tea, for this commendable purpose. The conscientious girl was very tired to-night, with her seven hours' session at the Council, and collected her flock with difficulty. As soon as the doors were shut, they began at once to sing. The conscientious girl played the instrument known as a cabinet organ. The children shrilly sang:

The Reverend Malachi Matthew

“Jesus loves me, that I know,  
For the Bible tells me so!”

“Hear that,” said Bob.

“Molly’s graduated from the Sunday-school,” said one of the girls. “She wasn’t sound.”

“You needn’t have *said* it, Meg,” said Molly, in a low voice. She looked down the dark street where the drunkard, now deserted by the rumseller, reeled away alone. At the bend of the road a shadowy figure or figures watched for him. It looked like a ghost of a woman holding the hand of a ghastly child.

“Poor Job!” said the girl. “I’m sorry for Job.”

The little voices from the vestry sang out, with gathering force:—

“Jesus loves me, that I know.”

“He took a shine to the new parson for a while,” said Molly. “And while they kept that Reform Club going he kept real straight. The women petted him at first; but I suppose they got tired of him. That Club’s about broke up. There’s nothing going on in Pepperville but heresy these days. Seems they’re so anxious we shall be damned in the next world they haven’t time to notice what we do in this.”

“I don’t know’s that’s exactly fair, Molly,” said the quietest of the girls. “Some of ’em mean well.”

“Oh! yes, we all mean well,” said Molly wearily. “Here’s Bob. *He* means well. Don’t you, Bob?”

She flung him a bitter look; but, softening, her fine, dark eyes wandered down the street.

“There’s Job’s wife, waiting for him. And the young one. See! She’s got him by the arm. How she begs! Asking him to go home. Cruel they are—men! Poor Betty! Job used to be a handsome fellow.”

She broke into wild singing; a snatch of a chorus that the girls liked and carried from loom to loom, with passionate power, on dark Winter afternoons:

“Let us live, let us live,  
While we can.  
Where is the soul  
Of a man?  
Find out for yourself;  
By and by  
To-morrow, to-morrow  
We die.”

One of Molly’s companions took up the refrain, and the horse-jockey struck in on the bass in the last line; but the Sunday class in the vestry went bravely on, and strong athwart the factory song, the children’s voices grew:

“Lord, thou hast here thy ninety-and-nine;  
Are they not enough for thee?  
But the shepherd made answer: ‘This of mine  
Has wandered away from me!’”

The conflict of these two discordant strains flung itself far in the clear November air; and many of the good people going home from the meeting-house heard the sound, and lingered, listening or commenting idly among themselves; how faithful Lucy was with her class; how rude the mill-girls were growing since the strike; and what was the point Dr. Croaker made about the

difference between restoration and annihilation? and, if a man were unable to repent until the Holy Spirit—

“But none of the ransomed ever knew  
How dark was the night that the Lord passed through,  
Till he found the sheep that was lost!”

Sang the little voices in the vestry.

“Come, Molly,” said the horse-jockey, after a moment’s hesitation. “Have an oyster supper?”

“I don’t know as I will to-night, Bob,” said the girl. The others had moved away. The young man and the young woman stood by themselves in the shadow of the now dark and deserted church. Molly looked up once at the height of the white, dumb building. In the darkness it seemed to frown.

“I go to the desert to find my sheep,”  
sang once more the unconscious children.

“Come, Molly.”

She shook her head, and, putting out one hand, she even gently motioned him away.

The Sunday-school hymns stopped. The conscientious girl closed the cabinet organ. The children flocked out. Lucy locked the vestry door. Her class clung about her, as she walked away. Their steps grew fainter. The voices of the crowd returning from the Council had now quite died away. These good people were all well in their respectable homes, preparing to eat their respectable suppers and respectably have family prayers. Mr. and Mrs. Malachi Matthew were sitting side by side, quite silent, aboard the evening train. The well-dressed rumseller vividly described the afternoon’s events across his counter, as he recommended “Bitters” to a boy who feared to find whiskey too much for him. Job Jacobs struck out rather hard at the man who spoke slightly of the parson, and, getting knocked down and more than usually trampled on, was sent home, looking badly enough, to his wife. She was listening, and came with a light in her hand. A sickly child followed her. The baby was crying. The house was cold, and there seemed to have been no supper.

“Poor Job!” she said, as they brought him in.

“It’s blamed ghastly here by the graveyard,” said Bob, after a long silence. “Ain’t you tired of it, Moll?”

“Go home without me—this once, Bob.”

“Molly, come!”

“I wonder how high that spire goes!” said Molly coldly. She was looking up, infinitely up, beyond the fine, vanishing point that the spire made against the sky, among the stars. But it tired her eyes to do this. She turned away and put her hand through the young fellow’s arm. She did not talk as they walked down the lighted street, and Bob hummed the factory song until she joined him, faintly, louder, clearer, strong at last:

“Let us live, let us live  
While we can.  
Where is the soul  
Of a man?”

## CHAPTER FOUR

“THE YOUNG WOMAN’S ACCOUNT”: WRITING WOMEN’S SEXUALITY

Magdalene  
At Bay  
Doherty

## INTRODUCTION

Sexuality, particularly female sexuality, was one of the most problematic concerns of the nineteenth century. The imperatives of Victorian morality insisted on hard attitudes and harsher judgments about any sexual act outside of marriage, but those acts, their causes, and their outcomes were to be kept hidden. In *The Dangerous Classes of New York* (1872), Charles Loring Brace depicts, in this description of sexuality among the poor, commonly held social codes and beliefs about sexual sins and female sexuality:

It has often seemed to me one of the most dark arrangements of this singular world that a female child of the poor should be permitted to start on its immortal career with almost every influence about it degrading, its inherited tendencies overwhelming toward indulgence of passion, its examples all of crime or lust, its lower nature awake long before its higher, and then that it should be allowed to soil and degrade its soul before the maturity of reason, and beyond all human possibility of cleansing!

For there is no reality in the sentimental assertion that the sexual sins of the lad are as degrading as those of the girl. The instinct of the female is more toward the preservation of purity, and therefore her fall is deeper. (115-16)

Not only were girls and women seen as further fallen, they were generally seen as unredeemable once they had fallen. In a study of female sexuality in the period, historians Ellen Dubois and Linda Gordon contend that while “the ‘fallen woman’ was always viewed as a direct victim, not only of male dominance in general, but of kidnapping, sexual imprisonment, starvation, and/or seduction,” emphasis on her victimization prevented her “transcending a sexual morality dividing women into the good and the bad” (9). Furthermore, any woman, regardless of her background, or whether or not she had come from Brace’s “dangerous classes” or a home of wealth and standing, once fallen, was considered a prostitute. Dubois and Gordon discuss “the common understanding that once a woman had sex outside of marriage she was ‘ruined,’ and would become a prostitute sooner or later. . . . once ‘used’ by a man, women became free game for that entire sex” (10). In the story of Ellen Doherty, included below, the gruff policeman-narrator notes how quickly the girl went from innocent to damned. Even the appearance of sexual promiscuity ruined reputations and, as Phelps depicts in the story “At Bay,” also in this chapter, just a hint of promiscuity had the potential to leave a person friendless and homeless.

Faced with these social codes and with stated desire to be “that kind of woman for which there is really, I find, no better word than Christian,” Elizabeth Stuart Phelps began to write about the fallen woman early in her career (*Chapters* 55). In this work she follows the example of Victorian poet Christina Rossetti who critiqued that misogynistic social structures that created the fallen woman even as she worked to restore these women to full humanity in her writing and her benevolent work. Beginning with the story “Magdalene” in 1865, Phelps depicted these characters as Magdalenes, degraded women who were somehow nearest to Christ instead of forever fallen. Furthermore, in calling them Magdalene and its derivatives, Phelps overtly drew attention to the fact that she followed the example of Jesus in redeeming degraded and outcast women and girls. Aside from the several stories Phelps wrote about the fallen woman, including those below, her early novel *Hedged In* (1879) tells the story of an impoverished and degraded girl who is redeemed, first by other women into a happy and productive life, and then by Jesus at her death. Renovating cultural views of the fallen woman was a rather radical undertaking for women reformers and for reform writers like Phelps. While there were earlier movements to

address the problematic consequences of sexuality—for example the American Female Moral Reform Society was formed in 1834 and renamed the American Female Guardian Society in 1849—the matter received much wider attention later in the century. Catherine Clinton suggests that the Civil War might be one reason that women rejected conventional codes of propriety to help their fallen sisters. “War produces cultural shifts so dramatic that sexual attitudes, mores, and morality undergo sea changes when nations are under siege,” Clinton notes, and after the war, “the more women demanded a presence on the public platform during this era—the social housekeeping of the settlement house movement, the evangelical fervor of the temperance crusade, and the growth and development of women’s higher education—the more frenzied campaigns for social and sexual control grew” (61, 73). These campaigns and organizations tended to use the language of moral reform and they may, to today’s readers, seem condescending. However, Dubois and Gordon argue that nineteenth-century women’s reform work on prostitution was part of the development of feminism as we know it today. They suggest that those respectable women who risked reaching out “to women stigmatized as whores,” declared a female collectivity “that transcended class and moralistic divisions. The attitudes that we today perceive as a patronizing desire to ‘help,’ were initially a challenge to the punitive and woman-hating morality that made sexual ‘ruin’ a permanent and irredeemable condition for women” (14). While Phelps often has her fallen women die at the end of their stories, they are never depicted as irredeemable. In her hands, instead of being damned to a life of suffering and an eternity in hell, Nixy in *Hedged In*, Maggie, Martie, and Ellen in the stories below, and Phelps’s other fallen women, are recast as prodigals, wayward but not fallen, and ready to be brought back into the sight of love.

## THE STORIES

“Magdalene” was first published in *Hours at Home* 1 (Sep. 1865): 448-58. It was later reprinted under the title “One of the Elect” in *Men, Women, and Ghosts* (Boston: Fields, Osgood & Co., 1869).

“At Bay” appeared in *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 34 (May 1867): 780-87.

“Doherty” first appeared in *The Independent* 29 Nov. 1877: 1-2, and was reprinted in *Sealed Orders* (Boston: Houghton, Osgood and Company, 1879).

## MAGDALENE, OR, ONE OF THE ELECT

“DOWN, Muff! down!”

Muff obeyed; he took his paws off from his master's shoulders with an injured look in his great mute eyes, and consoled himself by growling at the cow. Mr. Ryck put a sudden stop to a series of gymnastic exercises commenced between them, by throwing the creature's hay down upon her horns; then he watered his horse, fed the sheep, took a look at the hens, and closed all the doors tightly; for the night was cold, so cold that he shivered, even under that great bottle-green coat of his: he was not a young man.

“Pretty cold night, Muff!” Muff was not blest with a forgiving disposition; he maintained a dignified silence. But his master did not feel the slight. Something, perhaps the cold, made him careless of the dog to-night.

The house was warm, at least; the light streamed far out of the kitchen window, down almost to the orchard. He passed across it, showing his figure a little stooping, and the flutter of gray hair from under his hat; then into the house. His wife was busied about the room, a pleasant room for a kitchen, with the cleanest of polished floors and whitened tables; the cheeriest of fires, the home-like faces of blue and white china peeping through the closet door; a few books upon a little shelf, with an old Bible among them; the cosey rocking-chair that always stood by the fire, and a plant or two in the south window. He came in, stamping off the snow; Muff crawled behind the stove, and gave himself up to a fit of metaphysics.

“Cold, Amos?”

“Of course. What else should I be, woman?”

His wife made no reply. His unusual impatience only saddened her eyes a little. She was one of those women who would have borne a life-long oppression with dumb lips. Amos Ryck was not an unkind husband, but it was not his way to be tender; the years which had whitened his hair had brought him stern experiences: life was to him a battle, his horizon always that about a combatant. But he loved her.

“Most ready to sit down, Martha?” he said at last, more gently.

“In a minute, Amos.”

She finished some bit of evening work, her step soft about the room. Then she drew up the low rocking-chair with its covering of faded crimson chintz, and sat down by her husband.

She did this without noise; she did not sit too near to him; she took pains not to annoy him by any feminine bustle over her work; she chose her knitting, as being always most to his fancy; then she looked up timidly into his face. But there was a frown, slight to be sure, but still a frown, upon it, neither did he speak. Some gloomy, perhaps some bitter thought held the man. A reflection of it might have struck across her, as she turned her head, fixing her eyes upon the coals.

The light on her face showed it pale; the lines on her mouth were deeper than any time had worn for her husband; her hair as gray as his, though he was already a man of grave, middle age, when the little wife—hardly past her sixteenth birthday—came to the farm with him.

Perhaps it is these silent women—spiritless, timid souls, like this one,—who have, after all, the greatest capacity for suffering. You might have thought so, if you had watched her. Some infinite mourning looked out of her mute brown eyes. In the very folding of her hands there was a sort of stifled cry, as one whose abiding place is in the Valley of the Shadow.

## Magdalene

A monotonous sob of the wind broke at the corners of the house; in the silence between the two, it was distinctly heard. Martha Ryck's face paled a little.

"I wish—" She tried to laugh. "Amos, it cries just like a baby."

"Nonsense!"

Her husband rose impatiently, and walked to the window. He was not given to fancies; all his life was ruled and squared up to a creed. Yet I doubt if he liked the sound of that wind much better than the woman. He thrummed upon the window-sill, then turned sharply away.

"There's a storm up, a cold one too."

"It stormed when—"

But Mrs. Ryck did not finish her sentence. Her husband, coming back to his seat, tripped over a stool,—a little thing it was, fit only for a child; a bit of dingy carpet covered it: once it had been bright.

"Martha, what *do* you keep this about for? It's always in the way!" setting it up angrily against the wall.

"I won't, if you'd rather not, Amos."

The farmer took up an almanac, and counted out the time when the minister's salary and the butcher's bill were due; it gave occasion for making no reply.

"Amos!" she said at last. He put down his book.

"Amos, do you remember what day it is?"

"I'm not likely to forget." His face darkened.

"Amos," again, more timidly, "do you suppose we shall ever find out?"

"How can I tell?"

"Ever know anything,—just a little?"

"We know enough, Martha."

"Amos! Amos!" Her voice rising to a bitter cry, "we don't know enough! God's the only one that knows enough. He knows whether she's alive, and if she's dead he knows, and where she is; if there was ever any hope, and if her mother—"

"Hope, Martha, for *her!*"

She had been looking into the fire, her attitude unchanged, her hands wrung one into the other. She roused at that, something in her face as if one flared a sudden light upon the dead.

"What ails you, Amos? You're her father; you loved her when she was a little, innocent child."

When she was a child, and innocent,—yes. *That* was long ago. He stopped to walk across the room, and sat down, his face twitching nervously. But he had nothing to say, —not one word to the patient woman watching him there in the firelight, not one for love of the child who had climbed upon his knee and kissed him in that very room, who had played upon that little faded cricket, and wound her arms about the mother's neck, sitting just so, as she sat now. Yet he *had* loved her, the pure baby. That stung him. He could not forget it, though he might own no fatherhood to the wanderer.

Amos Ryck was a respectable man; he had the reputation of an honest, pious farmer to maintain. Moreover, he was a deacon in the church. His own life, stern in its purity, could brook no tenderness toward offenders. His own child was as shut out from his forgiveness as he deemed her to be from the forgiveness of his God. Yet you would have seen, in one look at that man, that this blow with which he was smitten had cleft his heart to its core.



“The young woman’s account”: Writing Women’s Sexuality

This was her birthday,—hers whose name had not passed his lips for years. Do you think he had once forgotten it since its morning? Did not the memories it brought crowd into every moment? Did they not fill the very prayers in which he besought a sin-hating God to avenge him of all his enemies?

So many times the child had sat there at his feet on this day, playing with some birthday toy, —he always managed to find her something, a doll or a picture-book; she used to come up to thank him, pushing back her curls, her little red lips put up for a kiss. He was very proud of her, —he and the mother. She was all they had,—the only one. He used to call her “God’s dear blessing,” softly, while his eyes grew dim; she hardly heard him for his breaking voice.

She might have stood there and brought back all those dead birthday nights, so did he live them over. But none could know it; for he did not speak, and the frown knotted darkly on his forehead. Martha Ryck looked up at last into her husband’s face.

“Amos, if she *should* ever come back!” He started, his eyes freezing.

“She won’t! She—”

Would he have said “she *shall* not?” God only knew.

“Martha, you talk nonsense! It’s just like a woman. We’ve said enough about this. I suppose He who’s cursed us has got his own reasons for it. We must bear it, and so must she.”

He stood up, stroking his beard nervously, his eyes wandering about the room; he did not, or he could not, look at his wife. Muff, rousing from his slumbers, came up sleepily to be taken some notice of. She used to love the dog,—the child; she gave him his name in a frolic one day; he was always her play-fellow; many a time they had come in and found her asleep with Muff’s black, shaggy sides for a pillow, and her little pink arms around his neck, her face warm and bright with some happy dream.

Mr. Ryck had often thought he would sell the creature; but he never had. If he had been a woman, he would have said he could not. Being a man, he argued that Muff was a good watch-dog, and worth keeping.

“Always in the way, Muff!” he muttered, looking at the patient black head rubbed against his knee. He was angry with the dog at that moment; the next he had repented; the brute had done no wrong. He stooped and patted him. Muff returned to his dreams content.

“Well, Martha,” he said, coming up to her uneasily, “you look tired.”

“Tired? No, I was only thinking, Amos.”

The pallor of her face, its timid eyes and patient mouth, the whole crushed look of the woman, struck him freshly. He stooped and kissed her forehead, the sharp lines of his face relaxing a little.

“I did n’t mean to be hard on you, Martha; we both have enough to bear without that, but it’s best not to talk of what can’t be helped,—you see.”

“Yes.”

“Don’t think anything more about the day; it’s not—it’s not really good for you; you must cheer up, little woman.”

“Yes, Amos.”

Perhaps his unusual tenderness gave her courage; she stood up, putting both arms around his neck.

“If you’d only try to love her a little, after all, my husband! He would know it; He might save her for it.”

## Magdalene

Amos Ryck choked, coughed, and said it was the time for prayers. He took down the old Bible in which his child's baby-fingers used to trace their first lessons after his own, and read, not of her who loved much and was forgiven, but one of the imprecatory Psalms.<sup>53</sup>

When Mrs. Ryck was sure that her husband was asleep that night, she rose softly from her bed, un-locked, with a noiseless key, one of her bureau drawers, took something from it, and then felt her way down the dark stairs into the kitchen.

She drew a chair up to the fire, wrapped her shawl closely about her, and untied, with trembling fingers, the knots of a soft silken handkerchief in which her treasures were folded.

Some baby dresses of purest white; a child's little pink apron; a pair of tiny shoes, worn through by pattering feet; and a toy or two all broken, as some impatient little fingers had left them; she was such a careless baby! Yet they never could scold her, she always affected such pretty surprises, and wide blue-eyed penitence: a bit of a queen she was at the farm.

Was it not most kindly ordered by the Infinite Tenderness which pitieth its sorrowing ones, that into her still hours her child should come so often only as a child, speaking pure things only, touching her mother so like a restful hand, and stealing into a prayer?

For where was ever grief like this one? Beside this sorrow, death was but a joy. If she might have closed her child's baby-eyes, and seen the lips which had not uttered their first "Mother!" stilled, and laid her away under the daisies, she would have sat there alone that night, and thanked Him who had given and taken away.

But *this*,—a wanderer upon the face of the earth,—a mark, deeper seared than the mark of Cain, upon the face which she had fondled and kissed within her arms; the soul to which she had given life, accursed of God and man,—to measure this, there is no speech nor language.

Martha Ryck rose at last, took off the covers of the stove, and made a fresh blaze which brightened all the room, and shot its glow far into the street. She went to the window to push the curtain carefully aside, stood a moment looking out into the night, stole softly to the door, unlocked it, then went upstairs to bed.

The wind, rising suddenly that night, struck sharply through the city. It had been cold enough before, but the threatened storm foreboded that it would be worse yet before morning. The people crowded in a warm and brilliant church cast wandering glances from the preacher to the painted windows, beyond which the night lay darkly, thought of the ride home in close, cushioned carriages, and shivered.

So did a woman outside, stopping just by the door, and looking in at the hushed and sacred shelter. Such a temperature was not the best medicine for that cough of hers. She had just crawled out of the garret, where she had lain sick, very sick, for weeks.

Passing the door of the Temple which reared its massive front and glittering windows out of the darkness of the street, her ear was caught by the faint, muffled sound of some anthem the choir were singing. She drew the hood of her cloak over her face, turned into the shadow of the steps, and, standing so, listened. Why, she hardly knew. Perhaps it was the mere entreaty of the music, for her dulled ear had never grown deaf to it; or perhaps a memory, flitting as a shadow, of other places and other times, in which the hymns of God's church had not been strange to her. She caught the words at last, brokenly. They were of some one who was wounded. Wounded! she held her breath, listening curiously. The wind shrieking past drowned the rest; only the

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<sup>53</sup> Imprecatory Psalms are those which include prayers for God to curse the psalmist's enemies.

“The young woman’s account”: Writing Women’s Sexuality

swelling of the organ murmured above it. She stole up the granite steps just within the entrance. No one was there to see her, and she went on tiptoe to the muffled door, putting her ear to it, her hair falling over her face. It was some plaintive minor air they were hymning, as sad as a dying wail, and as sweet as a mother’s lullaby.

“But He was wounded; He was wounded for our transgression; He was bruised for our iniquities.”

Then, growing slower and more faint, a single voice took up the strain, mournfully but clearly, with a hush in it as if one sang on Calvary.

“Yet we hid, as it were, our faces from Him. He was despised, and we esteemed him not.”

Well; He only knows what it spoke to the woman, who listened with her guilty face hidden in her hair; how it drew her like a call to join the throng that worshipped him.

“I’d like to hear the rest,” she muttered to herself. “I wonder what it is about.”

A child came down from the gallery just then, a ragged boy, who, like herself, had wandered in from the street.

“Hilloa, Meg!” he said, laughing, “*you* going to meeting? That’s a good joke!” If she had heard him, she would have turned away. But her hand was on the latch; the door had swung upon its noiseless hinges; the pealing organ drowned his voice. She went in and sat down in an empty slip close by the door, looking about her for the moment in a sort of childish wonder. The church was a blaze of light and color. One perceived a mist of gayly dressed people, a soft flutter of fans, and faint, sweet perfumes below; the velvet-cushioned pulpit, and pale, scholarly outlines of the preacher’s face above; the warmth of rainbow-tinted glass; the wreathed and massive carving of oaken cornice; the glitter of gas-light from a thousand prisms, and the silence of the dome beyond.

The brightness struck sharply against the woman sitting there alone. Her face seemed to grow grayer and harder in it. The very hush of that princely sanctuary seemed broken by her polluted presence. True, she kept afar off; she did not so much as lift up her eyes to heaven; she had but stolen in to hear the chanted words that were meant for the acceptance and the comfort of the pure, bright worshippers,—sinners, to be sure, in their way; but then, Christ died for *them*. This tabernacle, to which they had brought their purple and gold and scarlet, for his praise, was not meant for such as Meg, you know.

But she had come into it, nevertheless. If He had called her there, she did not know it. She only sat and listened to the chanting, forgetting what she was; forgetting to wonder if there were one of all that reverent throng who would be willing to sit and worship beside her.

The singing ended at last, and the pale preacher began his sermon. But Meg did not care for that; she could not understand it. She crouched down in the corner of the pew, her hood drawn far over her face, repeating to herself now and then, mechanically as it seemed, the words of the chant.

“Wounded—for our transgressions; and bruised,”—muttering, after a while,—“Yet we hid our faces.” Bruised and wounded! The sound of words attracted her; she said them over and over. She knew who He was. Many years ago she had heard of him; it was a great while since then; she had almost forgotten it. Was it true? And was he perhaps,—was there a little chance it meant, he was bruised for her,—for *her*? She began to wonder dimly, still muttering the sorrowful words down in her corner, where no one could hear her.

I wonder if He heard them. Do you think he did? For when the sermon was ended, and the choir sang again,—still of him, and how he called the heavy-laden, and how he kept his own

rest for them, she said,—for was she not very weary and heavy-laden with her sins?—still crouching down in her corner, “That’s me. I guess it is. I’ll find out.”

She fixed her eyes upon the preacher, thinking, in her stunted, childish way, that he knew so much, so many things she did not understand, that surely he could tell her,—she should like to have it to think about; she would ask him. She rose instinctively with the audience to receive his blessing, then waited in her hooded cloak, like some dark and evil thing, among the brilliant crowd. The door opening, as they began to pass out by her, swept in such a chill of air as brought back a spasm of coughing. She stood quivering under it, her face livid with the pain. The crowd began to look at her curiously, to nod and whisper among themselves.

The sexton stepped up nervously; he knew who she was. “Meg, you’d better go. What are you standing here for?”

She flung him a look out of her hard, defiant eyes; she made no answer. A child, clinging to her mother’s hand, looked up as she went by, pity and fear in her great wondering eyes. “Mother, see that poor woman; she’s hungry or cold!”

The little one put her hand over the slip, pulling at Meg’s cloak. “What’s the matter with you? Why don’t you go home?”

“Bertha, child, are you crazy?” Her mother caught her quickly away. “Don’t touch that woman!”

Meg heard it.

Standing, a moment after, just at the edge of the aisle, a lady, clad in velvet, brushed against her, then gathered her costly garments with a hand ringed and dazzling with diamonds, shrinking as if she had touched some accursed thing, and sweeping by.

Meg’s eyes froze at that. This was the sanctuary, these the worshippers of Him who was bruised. His message could not be for her. It would be of no use to find out about him; of no use to tell him how she loathed herself and her life; that she wanted to know about the Rest, and about that heavy-laden one. His followers would not brook the very flutter of her dress against their pure garments. They were like him; he could have nothing to say to such as she.

She turned to go out. Through the open door she saw the night and the storm. Within was the silent dome, and the organ-hymn still swelling up to it.

It was still of the wounded that they sang. Meg listened, lingered, touched the preacher on the arm as he came by.

“I want to ask you a question.”

He started at the sight of her, or more perhaps at the sharpness in her voice.

“Why, why, who are you?”

“I’m Meg. You don’t know me. I ain’t fit for your fine Christian people to touch; they won’t let their little children speak to me.”

“Well?” he said, nervously, for she paused.

“Well? You’re a preacher. I want to know about Him they’ve been singing of. I came in to hear the singing. I like it.”

“I—I don’t quite understand you,” began the minister. “You surely have heard of Jesus Christ.”

“Yes,” her eyes softened, “somebody used to tell me; it was mother; we lived in the country. I was n’t what I am now. I want to know if he can put me back again. What if I should tell him I was going to be different? Would he hear me, do you suppose?”

Somehow the preacher’s scholarly self-possession failed him. He felt ill at ease, standing there with the woman’s fixed black eyes upon him.

“The young woman’s account”: Writing Women’s Sexuality

“Why, yes; he always forgives a repentant sinner.”

“Repentant sinner.” She repeated the words musingly. “I don’t understand all these things. I’ve forgotten most all about it. I want to know. Could n’t I come in some way with children and be learnt ’em? I would n’t make any trouble.”

There was something almost like a child in her voice just then, almost as earnest and as pure. The preacher took out his handkerchief and wiped his face; then he changed his hat awkwardly from hand to hand.

“Why, why, really, we have not provision in our Sabbath school for cases like this: we have been meaning to establish an institution of a missionary character, but the funds cannot be raised just yet. I am sorry; I don’t know but—”

“It’s no matter!”

Meg turned sharply away, her hands dropping lifelessly; she moved toward the door. They were alone now in the church, they two.

The minister’s pale cheek flushed; he stepped after her.

“Young woman!”

She stopped, her face turned from him.

“I will send you to some of the city missionaries, or I will go with you to the Penitent’s Retreat. I should like to help you. I—”

He would have exhorted her to reform as kindly as he knew how; he felt uncomfortable at letting her go so; he remembered just then who washed the feet of his Master with her tears. But she would not listen. She turned from him, and out into the storm, some cry on her lips,—it might have been:—

“There ain’t nobody to help me. I *was* going to be better!”

She sank down on the snow outside, exhausted by the racking cough which the air had again brought on.

The sexton found her there in the shadow, when he locked the church doors.

“Meg! you here? What ails you?”

“*Dying*, I suppose!”

The sight of her touched the man, she lying there alone in the snow; he lingered, hesitated, thought of his own warm home, looked at her again. If a friendly hand should save the creature,—he had heard of such things. Well? But how could he take her into his respectable home? What would people say?—the sexton of the Temple! He had a little wife there too, pure as the snow upon the ground to-night. Could he bring them under the same roof?

“Meg!” he said, speaking in his nervous way, though kindly, “you *will* die here. I’ll call the police and let them take you where it’s warmer.”

But she crawled to her feet again.

“No you won’t!”

She walked away as fast as she was able, till she found a still place down by the water, where no one could see her. There she stood a moment irresolute, looked up through the storm as if searching for the sky, then sank upon her knees down in the silent shade of some timber.

Perhaps she was half-frightened at the act, for she knelt so a moment without speaking. There she began to mutter: “Maybe he won’t drive me off; if they did, maybe he won’t. I should just like to tell him, anyway!”

So she folded her hands, as she had folded them once at her mother’s knee.

“O Lord! I’m tired of being *Meg*. I should like to be something else!”

## Magdalene

Then she rose, crossed the bridge, and on past the thinning houses, walking feebly through the snow that drifted against her feet.

She did not know why she was there, or where she was going. She repeated softly to herself now and then the words uttered down in the shade of the timber, her brain dulled by the cold, faint, floating dreams stealing into them.

Meg! tired of being Meg! She was n't always that. It was another name, a pretty name she thought, with a childish smile,—Maggie. They always call her that. She used to play about among the clover-blossoms and buttercups then; the pure little children used to kiss her; nobody hooted after her in the street, or drove her out of church, or left her all alone out in the snow, — *Maggie!*

Perhaps, too, some vague thought came to her of the mournful, unconscious prophecy of the name, as the touch of the sacred water upon her baby-brow had sealed it,—Magdalene.

She stopped a moment, weakened by her toiling against the wind, threw off her hood, the better to catch her laboring breath, and standing so, looked back at the city, its lights glimmering white and pale, through the falling snow.

Her face was a piteous sight just then. Do you think the haughtiest of the pure, fair women in yonder treasured homes could have loathed her as she loathed herself at that moment?

Yet it might have been a face as fair and pure as theirs; kisses of mother and husband might have warmed those drawn and hueless lips; they might have prayed their happy prayers, every night and morning, to God. *It might have been.* You would almost have thought he had meant it should be so, if you had looked into her eyes sometimes,—perhaps when she was on her knees by the timber; or when she listened to the chant, crouching out of sight in the church.

Well, it was only that it might have been. Life could have no possible blessed change for her, you know. Society had no place for it, though she sought it carefully with tears. Who of all God's happy children that he had kept for sin would have gone to her and said, "My sister, his love holds room for you and me"; have touched her with her woman's hand, held out to her her woman's help, and blessed her with her woman's prayers and tears?

Do you think Meg knew the answer? Had she not learned it well, in seven wandering years? Had she not read it in every blast of this bitter night, out into which she had come to find a helper, when all the happy world passed by her, on the other side?

She stood there, looking at the glittering of the city, then off into the gloom where the path lay through the snow. Some struggled was in her face.

"Home! home and mother! She don't want me,—nobody wants me. I'd better go back."

The storm was beating upon her. But, looking from the city to the drifted path, and back from the lonely path to the lighted city, she did not stir.

"I should like to see it, just to look in the window, a little,—it would n't hurt 'em any. Nobody 'd know."

She turned, walking slowly where the snow lay pure and untrodden. On, out of sight of the town, where the fields were still; thinking only as she went, that nobody would know,—nobody would know. She would see the old home out in the dark; she could even say good-by to it quite aloud, and they would n't hear her, or come and drive her away. And then—

She looked around where the great shadows lay upon the fields, felt the weakening of her limbs, her failing breath, and smiled. Not Meg's smile; a very quiet smile, with a little quiver in it. She would find a still place under the trees somewhere; the snow would cover her quite out of sight before morning,—the pure, white snow. She would be only Maggie then.

“The young woman’s account”: Writing Women’s Sexuality

The road, like some familiar dream, would at last into the village. Down the street where her childish feet had pattered in their playing, by the old town pump, where, coming home from school, she used to drink the cool, clear water on summer noons, she passed,—a silent shadow. She might have been the ghost of some dead life, so moveless was her face. She stopped at last, looking about her.

“Where? I most forget.”

Turning out from the road, she found a brook half hidden under the branches of a dripping tree,—frozen now; only a black glare of ice, where she pushed away the snow with her foot. It might have been a still, green place in summer, with banks of moss, and birds singing overhead. Some faint color flushed all her face; she did not hear the icicles dropping from the lonely tree.

“Yes,”—she began to talk softly to herself,—“this is it. The first time I ever saw him, he stood over there under the tree. Let me see; was n’t I crossing the brook? Yes, I was crossing the brook; on the stones. I had a pink dress. I looked in the glass when I went home,” brushing her soft hair out of her eyes. “Did I look pretty? I can’t remember. It’s a great while ago.”

She came back into the street after that, languidly, for the snow lay deeper. The wind, too, had chilled her more than she knew. The sleet was frozen upon her mute, white face. She tried to draw her cloak more closely about her, but her hands refused to hold it. She looked at them curiously.

“Numb? How much farther, I wonder?”

It was not long before she came to it. The house stood up silently in the night. A single light glimmered far out upon the garden. Her eye caught it eagerly. She followed it down, across the orchard, and the little plats where the flowers used to go out in the morning and pick them for her mother,—a whole apronful, purple, and pink, and white, with dewdrops on them. She was fit to touch them then. Her mother used to smile when she brought them in. Her mother! Nobody ever smiled so since. Did she know it? Did she ever wonder what had become of her,—the little girl who used to kiss her? Did she ever want to see her? Sometimes, when she prayed up in the old bedroom, did she remember her daughter who had sinned, or guess that she was tired of it all, and how no one in all the wide world would help her?

She was sleeping there now. And the father. She was afraid to see him; he would send her away, if he knew she had come out in the snow to look at the old home. She wondered if her mother would.

She opened the gate, and went in. The house was very still. So was the yard, and the gleam of light that lay golden on the snow. The numbness of her body began to steal over her brain. She thought at moments, as she crawled up the path upon her hands and knees,—for she could no longer walk,—that she was dreaming some pleasant dream; that the door would open, and her mother come out to meet her. Attracted like a child by the broad belt of light, she followed it over and through a piling drift. It led her to the window where the curtain was pushed aside. She managed to reach the blind, and so stand up a moment, clinging to it, looking in, the glow from the fire sharp on her face. Then she sank down upon the snow by the door.

Lying so, her face turned up against it, her stiffened lips kissing the very dumb, unanswering wood, a thought came to her. She remembered the day. For seven long years she had not thought of it.

A spasm crossed her face, her hands falling clinched. Who was it of whom it was written, that better were it for the man if he had never been born? Of Magdalene, more vile than Judas, what should be said?

Yet it was hard, I think, to fall so upon the very threshold,—so near the quiet, peaceful room, with the warmth, and light, and rest; to stay all night in the storm, with eyes turned to that dead, pitiless sky, without one look into her mother's face, without one kiss, or gentle touch, or blessing, and die so, looking up! No one to hold her hand and look into her eyes, and hear her say she was sorry,—sorry for it all! That they should find her there in the morning, when her poor, dead face could not see if she were forgiven!

“I should like to go in,” sobbing, with the first tears of many years upon her cheek, — weak, pitiful tears, like a child's,—“just in out of the cold!”

Some sudden strength fell on her after that. She reached up, fumbling for the latch. It opened at her first touch; the door swung wide into the silent house.

She crawled in then, into the kitchen where the fire was, and the rocking-chair; the plants in the window, and the faded cricket upon the hearth; the dog, too, roused from his nap behind the stove. He began to growl at her, his eyes on fire.

“Muff!” she smiled weakly, stretching out her hand. He did not know her,—he was fierce with strangers. “Muff! don't you know me? I'm Maggie; there, there, Muff, good fellow!”

She crept up to him fearlessly, putting both her arms about his neck, in a way she had of soothing him when she was his playfellow. The creature's low growl died away. He submitted to her touch, doubtfully at first, then he crouched on the floor beside her, wagging his tail, wetting her face with his huge tongue.

“Muff, *you* know me, you old fellow! I'm sorry, Muff, I am,—I wish we could go out and play together again. I'm very tired, Muff.”

She laid her head upon the dog, just as she used to long ago, creeping up near the fire. A smile broke all over her face, at Muff's short, happy bark.

“*He* don't turn me off; he don't know; he thinks I'm nobody but Maggie.”

How long she lay so, she did not know. It might have been minutes, it might have been hours; her eyes wandering all about the room, growing brighter too, and clearer. They would know now that she had come back; that she wanted to see them; that she had crawled into the old room to die; that Muff had not forgotten her. Perhaps, *perhaps* they would look at her not unkindly, and cry over her just a little, for the sake of the child they used to love.

Martha Ryck, coming in at last, found her with her long hair falling over her face, her arms still about the dog, lying there in the firelight.

The woman's eyelids fluttered for an instant, her lips moving dryly; but she made no sound. She came up, knelt upon the floor, pushed Muff gently away, and took her child's head upon her lap.

“Maggie!”

She opened her eyes and looked up.

“Mother's glad to see you, Maggie.”

The girl tried to smile, her face all quivering.

“Mother, I—I wanted you. I thought I was n't fit.”

Her mother stooped and kissed her lips,—the polluted, purple lips, that trembled so.

“I thought you would come back to me, my daughter. I've watched for you a great while.”

She smiled at that, pushing away her falling hair.

“Mother, I'm so sorry.”

“Yes, Maggie.”



“The young woman’s account”: Writing Women’s Sexuality

“And, oh!” she threw out her arms; “O, I’m so tired, I’m so tired!”

Her mother raised her, laying her head upon her shoulder.

“Mother ’ll rest you, Maggie,” soothing her, as if she sang again her first lullaby, when she came to her, the little pure baby,—her only one.

“Mother,” once more, “the door was unlocked.”

“It has been unlocked every night for seven years, my child.”

She closed her eyes after that, some stupor creeping over her, her features in the firelight softening and melting, with the old child-look coming into them. Looking up at last, she saw another face bending over her, a face in which grief had worn stern lines; there were tears in the eyes, and some recent struggle quivering out of it.

“Father, I did n’t mean to come in,—I did n’t really; but I was so cold. Don’t send me off, father! I could n’t walk so far,—I shall be out of your way in a little while,—the cough—”

“I send you away, Maggie? I—I might have done it once; God forgive me! He sent you back, my daughter,—I thank him.”

A darkness swept over both faces then; she did not even hear Muff’s whining cry at her ear.

“Mother,” at last, the light of the room coming back, “there’s Somebody who was wounded. I guess I’m going to find him. Will he forget it all?”

“All, Maggie.”

For what did He tell the sin-laden woman who came to him once, and dared not look into his face? Was ever soul so foul and crimson-stained that he could not make it pure and white? Does he not linger till his locks are wet with the dews of night, to listen for the first, faint call of any wanderer crying to him in the dark?

So He came to Maggie. So he called her by her name,—Magdalene, most precious to him; whom he had bought with a great price; for whom, with groanings that cannot be uttered, he had pleaded with his Father: Magdalene, chosen from all eternity, to be graven in the hollow of his hand, to stand near him before the throne, to look with fearless eyes into his face, to touch him with her happy tears among his sinless ones forever.

And think you that then, any should scorn the woman whom the high and lofty One, beholding, did thus love? Who could lay anything to the charge of his elect?

Perhaps he told her all this, in the pauses of the storm, for something in her face transfigured it.

"Mother, it's all over now. I think I shall be your little girl again."

And so, with a smile, she went to Him. The light flashed broader and brighter about the room, and on the dead face there,—never Meg's again. A strong man, bowed over it, was weeping. Muff moaned out his brute sorrow where the still hand touched him.

But Martha Ryck, kneeling down beside her only child, gave thanks to God.

## AT BAY

(I had intended to tell the story myself; but the young woman's account is so much more to the point than another could be that I send her MS. just as it fell into my hands, only premising that it seems to me worth the reading.—E.)

I will tell you about it as well as I can, since you ask me to; though it frightens me to think of showing it to any one who knows how to write books; and I do hope you will excuse all mistakes, and remember that I can't tell things in a fine way, but only just as they happened. Of course you will not have it printed as it is, but will write it out yourself, and fix it up in some pretty way.

I do not wonder so much at your wanting to make a story out of Martie. It used to seem like a story to me as it went along. I often think when I have finished a novel, or a story in a magazine or newspaper—and I have read a good many this winter that Dan has brought home—that it is strange why the people who make them up can not find something *real* to say. It seems to me as if I knew a good many lives that I could put right into a book, if I only had the words, and make somebody feel glad or sorry, or help them or track them. But then, you know, I don't know any thing about it. I read a story once—it was a good while ago—called “Paul Blecker.” I saw in a paper that it was written by a lady who had written something called “Life in the Iron Mills.”<sup>54</sup> I never saw that, nor any thing more of hers, and I don't know who she is. I wish I could find her out and thank her for having written that story. It made you feel as if she knew all about you, and were sorry for you; and as if she thought nobody was too poor, or too uneducated, or too worn-out with washing-days, and all the things that do not sound a bit grand in books, to be written about. I think of it often now, since I have had the care and worry of the children here at home. It makes me love her, and it makes me respect her—stranger as she is, and so very far above and beyond any thing that I can ever be in this world or another.

To think that I have troubled you with all this, when I ought to have begun at once with Martie!

It is nothing of a story after all, when you come to it; so very simple and short. I suppose it means more to me because she *was* Martie. But I can not help hoping that, after you have altered it all over, so that it is fit to print, it may make somebody think a little about us poor country girls who go into the cities, homesick and unprotected, to find work. Perhaps they could make it a bit easier or safer for us; and then very likely they couldn't. But it does you good—at least it does me—just to *be* thought about. Sometimes I used to see it in a lady's eyes in the street, or in a horse-car—just a look, and she would go, and I would never see her again; but when I was in bed at night I remembered it. I have heard Martie say the same.

You see, one does feel so lonely! I remember just how hard it was, leaving home; and Dan had already found me my place at Inkman, Tipes, & Co.'s, so that the way was smoothed

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<sup>54</sup>“Life in the Iron Mills” was written by Rebecca Harding Davis, a writer whose work marked the transition from romanticism to realism in America, and was published in *Atlantic Monthly* in April 1861. Her short story “Paul Blecker” was published in 1863. Phelps later paid further tribute to Davis in her article “Stories that Stay,” in which she described the effect Davis's novella had on her own work: “One could never say again that one did not understand. The claims of toil and suffering upon ease had assumed a new form” (*Century Magazine* 59 (1910): 120).

out for me at the beginning better than ever it was for Martie. But all that Dan could do never made it an easy way. I suppose I am one of hundreds like me, who turn to the cities for work; we start all about alike; we end terribly unlike.

You know how large the family is, and that father and Dan, though they were two as industrious and steady men as could be found at Long Meadow, had hard work of it making the two ends meet. In fact, they didn’t always meet; and it was when I found that out that I began to think a little for myself at night, when we were in bed and Mary Ann had gone to sleep; Mary Ann always did go to sleep first.

I had been well educated for a farmer’s daughter, as we counted education in Long Meadow. They had a hard pull to get me through the High School, for it was after the war had begun, and hard times; but mother was determined I should do it; so I graduated, and read my composition with the rest, and came home for father and Dan to support. Not that I was by any means idle, for I took the heaviest baking and dairy-work right off mother’s hands, and helped about the children’s sewing. If she could not have got along without me it would have been all very well, and I should have felt, and so would father, that I was fairly contributing to the household expenses. But Mary Ann was growing large enough to help her about the churning after school, and to mend the boys’ mittens very well; so I felt as if I should be better away. I respected myself more and I felt happier as soon as I had made up my mind to go.

I always learn a new thing easily. I had no trouble with type-setting after the first week or two, and never repented my decision. It is not so respectable, as the world goes, to work in a printing-office as to teach, and mother wanted me to take the district school. But I had rather go into a factory or do washing than to drudge in a hot school-room for three hundred a year. As to respectability, I told mother I would make my own, independently of my business, or I would go without.

But after all it was a little rough when the time came to say good-by. Mother *would* cry behind her apron, and father coughed, and Dan winked, and the children pulled hold of my dress so, and looked so pink and pretty! Then the old sitting-room and the kitchen, and the cat and the cows, and the horses, and the sunshine through the window-glass, and the dahlias nodding out in the front-yard with the frost on them—why, I don’t suppose I could tell you how leaving them seemed like leaving a part of myself, nor how I cried after Dan had put me into the car and given me my check and gone off.

I don’t suppose you would care to hear if I did tell you—not about that long, lonesome journey, and how long and lonesome the city seemed when I stepped out into the rattling streets, in the strange noise and hurry and dirt, nor how long and lonesome the time that I must stay in it, shut out from the red maples, and the sky, and the great wide fields of snow, and May-flowers, and clover-smells, and stillness, and sweetness, and home, and mother. I only speak of it because it made me feel, remembering all about it, so sorry for Martie.

I was a great deal more sorry for her than I was for myself, just because she hadn’t what I had to brave. The night that she came to our house—I boarded with Mrs. M’Cracken—I thought that she had the most homesick face I ever saw. The room which she had engaged would not be vacant for three days—it was Josie Sewell’s, and Josie was going home sick; so Mrs. M’Cracken asked, Would I let her sleep with me for a night or two? I don’t generally like to sleep with strangers, but I had the queerest feeling about her, as if I wanted to talk away or kiss away that homesickness out of her face; so I said Yes most willingly. Though, to be sure, it would not have made much difference if I hadn’t been willing, for Mrs. M’Cracken scolded so if she did not have her way that the boarders all gave in to her.

## At Bay

I took Martie up stairs with me to take off her bonnet, and she thanked me, but did not say any more, so I came down again. She looked so shy and uncomfortable when she came in to supper that I wished I had waited for her. The table was full too—printers we were almost all of us, except two seamstresses, two machine-girls, and one young stone-mason, David Bent. We used to call him Davie, because he was such a pleasant-spoken fellow, and willing to do a good turn for every body. It was a pretty name, and it seemed to suit him, though he was a great stoutly-built man over six feet.

I remember that Job Rice happened to be punctual to supper that night, and that he passed Martie the butter (Mrs. M'Cracken, by the way, did manage to get the worst butter that ever I tasted in my life).

Sue Cummings whispered to me, looking over at Martie as we sat down, that she was as homely as a hedge-fence. Now I don't think that any body but Sue would ever have thought of calling Martha Saunders homely. She was not exactly pretty either, but she certainly was prettier, it seemed to me, than Sue. Sue had black hair and bright cheeks too, and was called a very good-looking girl.

Martie was the palest woman that I ever saw, I believe—just cut like a little sad statue out of marble. I never saw a tinge of color in her face but twice in all the years I've known her. Her hair grew low on her forehead, and she had large eyes—they were gray eyes, set far apart. She had large hands, even larger than mine—for she had done rougher work—but white, like her face, and warm. She took up things in a strong, firm way, like a man. I never saw her hold her tea-cup with her little finger sticking out, like Sue. I noticed these things when she sat down opposite me full in the light. It gives me a cold, uncomfortable feeling looking back so far. I wish I had been the only one that noticed; yet not exactly that either, come to think of it.

I went up stairs with her after supper, and helped her put away her things, and presently got up the courage to ask her if she were coming in at Inkman & Tipes's. She said yes; that they had just given her Josie Sewell's place; that she hoped she should not be slow at learning the trade; and was it very hard to understand? I offered to teach her a little at nooning, and she turned her sweet gray eyes on me to thank me in such a way—nobody but Martie ever had such a way. I believe I loved her from that minute.

“You came from the country?” I said by-and-by.

“Yes.”

“Far?”

“About twenty miles.”

“I wonder if you are as homesick as I was,” I said as gently as I knew how. “You have a home, I suppose?”

She was standing by the pine wardrobe, hanging up one of her black dresses. She hung it up and buttoned the wardrobe door, and began to fold her shawl. I thought she was not going to answer me.

“I *had* a home,” she said at last.

She began to undress very fast without looking at me, and I felt that I had better not ask her any more questions. I sat up after she was in bed to read a chapter—mother made me promise always to read my chapter—and the light, where I had put it on the wash-stand, shone down against her face. I was reading somewhere in the genealogies, and it *wasn't* very interesting, and I could not keep my eyes off from her.<sup>55</sup> I have seen little children often since I

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<sup>55</sup> Sarah refers to the then widespread practice of reading a chapter from the Bible every

“The young woman’s account”: Writing Women’s Sexuality

have been in New York lost in the streets at twilight on a rainy day. Martie’s face that night reminded me of them. I wanted to throw down my Bible and comfort her up and cry with her; but I did not dare to.

I hope you will not laugh at me for making so much fuss over a homesick girl—as Sue did. At any rate I believe you would have done just what I did if you had been there. And I’m sure I didn’t do very much. I only kissed her, that was all. After I was in bed and the lamp was out, and we had lain still a while, I only stooped over and kissed her softly on both her eyes.

I was afraid she would be angry with me, but I really could not help it. And instead of being angry with me what do you suppose she did? Why, she threw her arms about my neck and broke out crying in the strangest way:

“It’s so long,” she said, “it’s so long since any body kissed me!”

She sobbed the words over and over in her odd, dry way without any tears as if she would never catch her breath; and I was so taken by surprise, and I didn’t know what to do, so I just held her there and let her say it over, “It’s so long—so long!”

Well, I suppose you know how short a time it takes for girls to get acquainted when they like each other. One hour is just as good as one year. So you will not be surprised nor laugh—I shouldn’t wonder if you *did* laugh a little though—to hear that before we went to sleep she knew all about me, and I knew all about her; and I felt almost as much at home with her as I did with Mary Ann. When the time came for her to take Josie’s room I wouldn’t hear of it, so we arranged with Mrs. M’Cracken to keep her with me.

She told me all about the home that *had* been, and how it was broken up—“buried,” she called it now. Her mother had been dead a great many years, and then two little brothers went next—there was consumption, I believe, both sides of the family—and last of all her father. He had been a shoemaker, comfortably off and kind-hearted, and he had sent her to school, and done every thing for her, and been every thing to her. She kept house for him till he was sick; then she used to bind shoes all day and half the night, sitting by his bed and watching to see if he wanted any thing. He had a little laid up, but it soon went for doctor’s bills, and so she supported them both and kept him in comforts to the last; and he died while he was kissing her good-night—died with his lips on her cheek.

After that the place grew so lonely to her—and the grave was right in sight every day as she went to work—and she said it seemed as if she *must* get away. But she did not know where to go, and she had nobody to tell her; so she staid on, till one week, all of a sudden, the Corporation failed. They had been crowding on hands at very high wages—eight dollars a week to good workers—running a venture against a rival Company, and, without any warning, the whole thing fell flat, turning five hundred hands out of work.

Martie took the next train for New York. She came in in the dark and cold as I did, only she had not a place provided in which to lay her head, and she did not know a face in all the great, strange city. She wandered about for two or three days trying to find work, and sleeping at a miserable little lodging-house that she came across—a place, she said afterward, to which she felt that no respectable girl ought to go. But what could she do? Money to board at a hotel she had not, and apply to the police she dared not; she said she was afraid that they would arrest her as a vagrant. Martie always had dreadful notions of the police; and so had I for that matter.

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night. The goal was to read both Testaments in their entirety every year. Genealogies occur in several chapters throughout, but as these are “the” genealogies, she likely refers to the important first set in Genesis or those in Matthew that trace David’s bloodline to Jesus.

They act, and I don't know but they must act, so different to a poor girl in a calico dress from what they do to the ladies who want to be helped across the mud in Broadway.

Perhaps there may be a place somewhere in the city where they take care of country girls until they can take care of themselves—I'm sure there ought to be—but if there is, I don't know where; nor did Martie. Dan told me that there is such a place in Boston, under the charge of some Catholic women. I think they must be very good women, and I don't say any thing against them; but I suppose Protestant people must know how much more girls think about saying their prayers and every thing good, when they are homesick and lonely, and how easily they can be turned and guided. I believe that any body who had cared for and been kind to Martie those first few days might have made—why, might have made a Buddhist of her without any trouble at all.

But at last, when she was all worn out and discouraged, she happened to come across Inkman & Tipes; and so Mr. Inkman, who said she looked like a smart girl, took her on trial, and the foreman told her about Josie Sewell and Mrs. M'Cracken, and that was the way she came to me, and—to so much else.

And if I don't hurry I shall never come to it.

The first day—I think it was the very first day—that Martie went to work, Job Rice came up when the foreman was looking the other way, and asked me to introduce him to the new girl. Now I never did like Job Rice—not from the first minute I saw him. I did not know much about him, nor had I any thing against him but his swearing and his face. All the fellows at our table swore though, except Davie Bent, and I shouldn't have thought so much of that but for his face. I can't explain what was the matter with that either, except that I did not like it. So I did not want him to speak to Martie, and I said so. Then he said he would get somebody else to do it, and that I was the rudest and most unreasonable girl he ever had seen at Inkman's. So I thought perhaps it was rude and unreasonable, and I took him over to Martie at the window. I used to blame myself for it afterward; but Martie said that was foolish, for it would have made no difference in the end. He walked home with her that day to dinner.

The next noon she begged me to wait for her; and when we were in the street she walked on so fast that I could hardly keep up. But Job could walk faster than we, and he gained upon us, and fell into step beside her.

“Just what she meant he should do!” said Sue from behind, in her spiteful way. Of course the other girl heard her.

The next day Martie said she wanted to see Mary Bailey about her sack-pattern, so Mary walked the other side. But where there's a will there's a way, they say, and Job Rice's wicked will found ways enough. He would come upon her suddenly as she waited after breakfast for me upon the stairs. He joined us at night, because he said it was too dark for us to come back alone. He waited about after supper when she staid to help Mrs. M'Cracken with the dishes—that went a little way toward her board, and she could not earn much, you know, till she had fairly learned her trade. He went to church whenever Martie did. He went to Sabbath-school just to sit in a class opposite and watch her. He was always asking her at the table to go with him to the theatre, or evening-school, or negro minstrels, or something, till he worried the poor child half sick.

Before long they were the talk of the house, and Sue Cummings did her best to see that they should be. The fact was, that Sue had been used to having things her own way among the boys, and especially with Job Rice, till Martie came.

“The young woman’s account”: Writing Women’s Sexuality

One night Davie Bent met me and walked home with me. Davie didn’t often walk home with me. Just as we came to the slope he asked me—we had been talking about Martie—if this was true that they said about her and Rice? He supposed she *did* like him, didn’t she?

I was thinking of something else—some thought of my own that it was silly to waste time over—and I did not say much to Martie when I first went up stairs. Presently I told her what Davie said. She turned just as quick, with a little stamp of her foot.

“And you? What did you say to him?”

So I told her what I said: that I knew she didn’t like Job, and that he worried and dogged her.

“Well, I should like to tell you something else to tell him. No, I suppose it would make it the worse for me though. I wish Job would let me alone. I *wish* he would let me alone!”

I noticed then how her eyes burned—just like coals at white heat; I never had seen them look so before.

“Martie,” said I, beginning to wonder, “what is the matter? What did you wish you could tell Davie? What has happened?”

She was brushing out her hair, and she stopped and threw down her brush with a childish burst of vehemence as if her nerves were strung to their tightest:

“Job Rice told me to-night he wanted to marry me, that what he did! He might have known what I would say, and he might have known what an insult it was after I’ve shown him and shown him how hateful he is to me. He said—I wouldn’t even tell you what he said. It seems as if I couldn’t bear it!”

“You told him?”

“I told him,” she said, slowly—“I told him I would rather be cut to pieces inch by inch! Explicit, wasn’t it, dear?”

She broke out laughing, but it sounded as if she would much rather cry; and by-and-by she hid her face in the pillows a while, and I shouldn’t wonder if she did cry.

“You see he said such things!” she said presently, her voice smothered up in the pillows. “He said such things to me! Father wouldn’t have let him, father wouldn’t! Oh, Sarah, Sarah!”

I was very sorry for her, though I had to be sorry without half understanding why. But after that I always felt that Martie was afraid of Job Rice. Sometimes it used to seem as if she let him go with her just to hush up words that were on his lips. One day when he had said something that displeased her, she flashed up a little, and told him before us all that he was a miserable cowardly villain to treat a girl so. I saw him go to his case, set up something quick in type, strike it off on a slip of paper, and toss it over to her. A gust from an open window blew it toward me, and I saw the three words: “*We will see.*”

They did not sound so very dreadful, to be sure; but when Martie read them that curious look, like a lost child, crept all over her face, and never went out of it all day, nor could I kiss it away at night, though I tried as hard as I could.

It was the next week, I believe, that we had our little week’s vacation that we had waited for so long. Business was dull just then, and Mr. Inkman was glad to let us off. I took Martie up to Long Meadow with me, and I verily believe that was one of the happiest weeks the poor girl ever spent in her life. Mother took her in as if she had been one of us, and kissed her, and cured her neuralgia, and made her flannel petticoats, and treated her just as she did me; and father used to pat her on the head when she had read the Almanac to him evenings. Poor little Martie! Her eyelids used to tremble a little at that. The children petted her to death, and as for Dan—well, well! poor fellow!—I don’t mind telling *you*—I am afraid Dan thought a great deal of Martie;

but I saw, and he saw, that it never could be; she would never care for him—in that way, I mean. I could not understand then why, Dan was so good and handsome. Poor Dan! I thought this winter that he might take a fancy to Jinny Coles; at least I hoped so; but he says he does not care to marry just yet, and Jinny calls him an old bachelor, and so do all the Long Meadow girls.

Well, Martie went out with me into the sweet spring days—there seemed to be a great many days to that week—and fed the cows, and looked at the horses, and played with the chickens, and hunted for May-flowers, and filled her carpet-bag with sea-weed moss to carry back; she liked it because it was cool, she said; she used to bury up her face in it and sit thinking.

“Sarah,” she said, the night before we went back, “I have felt so *safe* here. Just think if one could feel safe all the time!”

So to-morrow came, and we had to bid goodby to all the sweetness, and dearness, and safety; and the long, lonesome city looked longer and lonelier than ever.

When we got back, all drabbed and cold and tired, Mrs. M‘Cracken met me at the door.

“How do you do, Sarah?” said she, in a very high key. “You’ll find your room ready; and you’ll better take your bag and run right up, and not stand here lettin’ the draught in.—Marthy Saunders, I’m sorry to say I haven’t got any room for *you*.”

“Not any room for me!”

Martie turned about and looked at her. It was growing dark fast, and the dreary wind blew up from the street against her.

“No, I hain’t; and, I’m sorry to say, I never expect to. I’m a respectable widow, *I* am, and this ’ere’s a respectable house. I’ve no place for the likes of you!”

Martie just stood and looked at her—looked at her with her great, wide-open eyes. I don’t believe any of those little lost children could have been slower to take in the shameful words.

I must have said something dreadful to Mrs. M‘Cracken—I believe I told her she lied; then it occurred to me that that wasn’t polite, so I told her I should like to know what she was talking about, and whom she was talking about.

“I’m talkin’ about Marthy Saunders,” says she; “and I say girls as behaves shameful and loses their virtuous name, and then begs young men to marry ’em, ain’t fit company for me, nor my boarders! So, Marthy Saunders, I’ll be obleeged to you if you’ll jest step out of the way, for it’s cold, and I want the door shet!”

Then, for once of the two times, I saw the hot color go shooting all over Martie’s face, up to her forehead, down to her neck. It blazed for a minute like a jet of fire, and then died down. I never saw her look so white—I never saw her look so pure and white as she looked when it had gone.

She opened her lips to speak, but Mrs. M‘Cracken had slammed the door; slammed it so close upon her that her shawl was caught in the hinge.

The girls were laughing out in the dining-room, where they were playing forfeits with Davie Bent. The light twinkled out warmly through the side-glass, and shone down warmly from our own room where they had just made things ready for me. The dreary wind blew up from the street; the dust whirled about in clouds; two or three people went by in the dark, hurrying home. Poor little Martie!

Dear me! dear me! To think that I can’t write about it after all this time without crying!

I broke out into something about Job Rice, and the landlady, and what should we do? And had it all in a jumble of anger and grief and bewilderment; but noticed at last that Martie



stood yet, with her shawl shut in the door, perfectly still. I noticed, too, that her hand was lifted solemnly up above her head.

“Martie! Martie! what are you doing?”

“Praying God to settle accounts with him,” she said in a very quiet voice; but a voice no more like Martie’s than it was like Job’s. “Well, Sarah, good-by. You’d better go in.”

“He just did it for revenge!” I cried out, sobbing. “Poor Martie! poor Martie! And not a place for you to sleep this night!”

“You’d better go in,” she repeated, in the same strange, quiet way. “You will take cold. I suppose I can find a place. At least there’s the station-house always for such as us,” with a laugh. “Good-night, dear!”

But I never could have let her go in that way all alone; and though she did her best to send me back, I went out with her into the dreary wind to find a shelter for her head. Something in her face, as we passed the street-lamp at the corner, set me to thinking how it must choke and stifle one to walk on gasping in the cruel wind, leaving one’s good name further behind at every step. Then I thought of the warm light in our window, and the girls and Davie. Then I thought of the good, strong father—she had often told me how good and strong he was—and of the grave away in the country, and I wondered how he could bear it to be lying there, and she *here*, his only little daughter; and she said he had sheltered her in so with his love. Poor, poor little Martie! Why, I thought till it seemed as if my heart would break for her.

I looked up, I remember, into people’s faces as we passed, wondering why there wasn’t any body in all the city to help her. I knew there were many good men and women who would have trusted and cared for her, but we did not know where to find them, and Martie was so shy of strangers. I remember how the lamps flitted and whirled, and how bright the shop windows looked, as we walked on, still watching the people, face after face, for one kind look; one kind look would have given me courage to speak. It did seem to me strange that they could *help* noticing us. But nobody did notice, and we did not dare to speak. I went once into a jeweler’s, where I saw through the great plate-glass a pleasant-faced gentleman with gray hair, and I asked him could he tell me where a poor girl could get a respectable lodging for the night? He answered very pleasantly that the police would tell me best, and I ran out frightened, and did not try that again.

There were our employers, you say. Yes, but they did not know nor care much about the hands out of working hours. Mr. Inkman was a good sort of man; but he would not be likely to trouble himself that time of night about Martie. Besides, he would probably take Mrs. M’Cracken’s word for the truth, and it might cost Martie her place for him to hear the story. As for her Sunday-school teacher, why, she would about as soon have thought of going to the police, for she had never spoken with her except to give her name and answer the Bible-questions. Besides, we did not know where she lived. So Martie must help herself.

We went to boarding-houses till we were tired out. Nobody would take a strange girl in at night. Where had she been last? Mrs. M’Cracken’s. Had she a recommendation? No. They were sorry, but the house was full. Good-evening.

I don’t suppose they can be exactly blamed; but it seemed hard. Just such a night as that was to Martie has sent many of us poor girls right straight to destruction. It did seem hard.

Pretty soon, worn out and in a sort of desperation, she said that she should go back to the place where she spent her first few days in the city. I thought the police would be better than that; but she said no; what could she do in the hands of the police, with the character that she had brought away with her from the door-steps back there? She would go back to the old place and

take her chance. It was safe enough, probably, only she was foolish and fanciful. It would be better than to run the risk of worse. So we went, and they took her in.

I would have staid with her, I could not bear to have her there alone, but she would not listen to it. She said I should not lose my home and my good name with hers. She begged me so for her sake to go back that I had to go. She walked a little way with me till I would let her go no farther. Then I watched her going back alone.

I gave Job Rice a piece of my mind that night, and I stood up for Martie against Mrs. M'Cracken and the girls. But it was of no use. Sue had been before me to echo every word of Job's and a little more. Sue said it was just what she had always expected of her. When I looked at Sue's bold, bad face, and thought of that pure white look of Martie's, I wondered how God could *let* any body believe one against the other. But I suppose, after all, we do our own believing; we can not blame Him for it.

Davie Bent came up to me a minute as I stood apart by the window; Sue and Job had been talking so that I could not stand it.

"Davie," said I, between my teeth, "I hope God *will* 'settle accounts' with him fair and square, for it's a fiendish lie! It's a fiendish lie, Davie!"

He opened his kindly, honest eyes wide on me, and a color like a girl's went over his face.

"Did you think," said he, "*could* you think that I—"

Sue came up just then, in her inquisitive way, and he broke off and went out of the room.

I did not think to tell Martie of this for several days. It occurred to me when I did speak of it, and she looked up, that perhaps she would have liked to hear it before.

"You see, Martie," said I, "it is plain what he was going to say, though he didn't finish his sentence. He believes in you, and I knew he would."

But she shook her head drearily.

"You don't know that. He did not say so. He would have said something quite different. Nobody believes in me. Why should *he*?"

With that she turned away to look into a shop-window and said no more the rest of the way home.

"Davie wouldn't be so mean," I argued. "Davie is true, and fair, and good." But she would not talk about it.

She spent two weeks at that place. I never knew till it was all over, not till long after it was all over, just what she lived through there. How there was a rum-shop on the first-floor; how late the hooting and singing used to last; how she sat up night after night till two or three o'clock, unable to sleep for the noise and fear, and trying to muffle her windows, and the crack under the door, so that she should not hear the words they said and sung.

Her story came to Mr. Inkman's ears, too, soon enough, and there was talk of dismissing her; but it finally blew over; she was a valuable compositor, quick as a thought, and very accurate; and Inkman & Tipes did not care so much as they might have done about the morals of their hands.

But, take it altogether, those two were as miserable weeks as ever a poor girl lived. That lost look, I noticed, settled down into her face, and before they were over became her only look.

One night—it is a little thing to tell, but it hurt me at the time—it chanced that she had to carry proof to some editor—I've forgotten his name, but he was connected with a Magazine which Inkman & Tipes printed. The boy whose business it was to carry proof and copy was sick, and as the errand was right on Martie's way the foreman asked her to attend to it.

“The young woman’s account”: Writing Women’s Sexuality

The editor was at dinner—she told me about it afterward—and she had to wait for him a few moments in the hall. She was tired and faint, and the jets of gas-light dazzled her. She leaned up against the balusters for support, looking around at the carpeted hall and stairs, and in at the open door of the parlors, where glimpses of mirrors and crimson curtains, of pictures, and books, and flameless, hot coal fires showed through.<sup>56</sup> I know just how she must have looked, standing there, homeless and outcast, in the midst of it all.

While she was waiting a young girl about her own age—a pretty, delicate creature, with a rich dress and soft, ringed hands—came from somewhere and fluttered into the parlors, looking like a picture cut out against the flameless fires, and fluttered out again, softly humming a tune. Her father met her at the further end of the hall, and Martie, who had shrunk out of sight at the foot of the stairs, heard him say, the words broken up with a laughing kiss:

“Well, Empress Nell! So you insist on dragging your old father out to the concert tonight? The carriage will be punctual, and I hope you will be likewise. Your hair? Oh no, that doesn’t need to be frizzed over. You look pretty enough already. Be sure and wrap up warmly, dear; it is a chilly night. Jane, where did you leave the young woman? Is she waiting? Oh yes.”

It doesn’t seem so much to tell of, but it came over Martie so—this other girl, sheltered in by the light and elegance and warmth and love, so watched and protected, so pleased and petted through her happy days and nights—and she to be shut out into the cold and dark of the streets, shut back into her wretched room, home and help and good name gone—and the grave lying out far away in the night—it came over her so for the minute that she staggered up against the balusters, a sick faintness creeping all over her. I believe she might have had courage to tell the gentleman all about it had he asked her; and I suppose he would have asked her had he thought of it, for she said he had a pleasant face. But he was a busy man and hurried, so he took the proofs and opened the door politely for her, and she went slowly out. He must have been struck by her look, for she heard him say to his pretty daughter as he latched the door,

“That poor girl is very pale. Consumptive, probably. Come, Nell, fly away and get ready!”

At the end of the fortnight Martie had a dress to be cut at little Miss Tripp’s. And little Miss Tripp—God bless her for it!—no sooner had questioned the story all out of her than she said: “Martha Saunders, *I’ll* stand by you. You just leave that dreadful place and come board with me.”

So Martie went to little Miss Tripp’s, and I insisted on her letting me go with her. As to its “hurting my character,” which she argued in her dear, unselfish love, I said, as I had said about my respectability, I would make my own or go without.

We had been at Miss Tripp’s just a week when the most astounding thing happened. Martie came in one night with very bright eyes, and said:

“I am going to be married to Job Rice.”

I do not know what I did or said. I am sure I never was so bewildered and confounded in my life.

“We shall be married in three weeks,” she said, quietly drawing the curtain and beginning to take down her hair. “That is about as soon as I can get ready. You needn’t look so at me, Sarah. Continual dropping wears away the hardest stone, you know. Come, I am tired and want to go to bed.”

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<sup>56</sup> Balusters was a common term for staircase banisters.

I don't know what it was, but something in her eyes stopped me from reasoning with her. I tried it once, and after that I gave it up. So, still bewildered and confounded, shocked and worried and grieved, I yielded silently to Martie's plans for this horrible wedding. I cut out and basted and sewed; I bought patterns and tucked muslin; I went about and looked at her and touched her as if I had been in a nightmare.

Davie Bent had been home to see his mother, and had not heard. The first night that he came back—it was a warm, light spring night—he and Martie went to walk. I was sitting at my window thinking about them, when they came home and stopped by the steps a minute to talk. I remember how warm the air was sweeping up against my cheeks, and I remember how Davie's voice sounded so manly and low and still. I did not mean to hear, and I shrank back; but I had caught one word, and I knew—what I ought to have known long before; but it is very hard for us to find things out sometimes.

I did not notice Martie when she first came up; but presently she called me, and turning round I wondered what had happened.

"Sarah," she said. She waited a minute after that, and then I saw for the second and last time the color in her face—sweet, faint color, like a happy child's. It made her very pretty. "Sarah, he *did* believe in me all through."

"Martie," said I, very low, "he told you something more than that."

"Yes." She turned her head away quickly.

"I wonder what you told him."

"What should I tell him?" said she, turning back in a sharp way. "I have promised to marry Job Rice."

So we neither of us said any more about it.

Martie's wedding-day came on very fast, and we were very busy. She had spent all her money over her little outfit; and she could not have taken more pains over her white muslin dress if she had been going to be Job's very happy wife; I never *could* think that. It did seem to me as if I must stop it, and the nearer the time came the more terrible it seemed. But she never called it terrible. One of the last nights I broke out crying, and asked her if she had not a word to say to me about it.

"No," said she. "Why should I have?"

She had sent a special invitation to Mrs. M'Cracken, and the girls there, and Sue; and, strange as it seemed, they all came. We did not have many weddings, and it gave them something to talk about. We were all there waiting in Miss Tripp's little parlor—waiting in the nightmare, it seemed to me—when Martie came in with Job. She did not blush or look shy, as most girls do; she was pretty and white and quiet. I did not see what made her so quiet. There was an odd light in her eyes. It reminded me somehow of a look I have seen in pictures in the eyes of hunted creatures that had been driven till they could be driven no further.

Davie Bent was there, trying to flirt a little with Sue. He was very white. I felt sorry for Davie; sorrier that I did for Martie, or for—well no matter who!

The minister was a little late, and we were talking when he came in, but hushed up at sight of him. He was a tall, fine-looking gentleman, who treated Miss Tripp and Martie very politely—almost as politely as if they had been rich and educated ladies; and looked around the room with very keen eyes. Martie sent for him because she liked his sermons. She had been to his church several times; she did not go regularly, because it was a grand church, and she did not feel at home there.

“The young woman’s account”: Writing Women’s Sexuality

Dear me, how I trembled when he began the Marriage Service! And how still the room was! And how that hunted look in Martie’s eyes grew and brightened into another look—and that look was stranger yet!

The minister was through with what he had to say to Job; and Job, with his complacent, evil smile, had made his responses; and it came Martie’s turn, and you could have heard a pin drop. I remember how solemnly the words sounded:

“Do you take this man who stands beside you to be your wedded husband?”

He waited for her answer, and it came:

“*No! and I never will!*” and she flung off Job’s hand as if it had been a serpent, and stood there quivering.

In an instant every thing was in a hubbub. I’m sure I never saw a minister’s face look blanker than that minister’s face looked.

“Madam,” said he, with a low bow, “I consider that you have insulted me, and insulted my profession beyond hope of apology. I wish you good-evening!” and he walked right out of the room.

Miss Tripp screamed; Sue Cummings tried to faint; Job, purple with passion, gasped for breath to speak, and every thing was in an uproar. Above it I saw Martie standing still and triumphant; and above it I was conscious of Davie’s face with a sudden light striking it through and through.

Job found his voice at last, and he stood and swore at Martie, oath after oath; I never heard such swearing. She just stood there perfectly still and smiled. Then he turned upon her and raised his hand. I believe, woman though she was, he would have struck her to the floor, but there was a spring at the other end of the room; the girls made way screaming, and Davie just caught her out of Job’s reach in his great, strong arms, and held her—held her there, before us all—and she never struggled nor blushed; but the lost look faded out of her face in that minute, and I never saw it again.

So it was all explained now. She had not meant it so much for revenge, though it was revenge enough, and Job deserved it, and I’m glad he had it; but she took it as the only way possible to her to defend herself, and give the lie to his foul slanders. And to think how she had kept it from every human soul, and planned it so well, and done all her sewing, that Davie never suspected the truth till it came; and, stranger than that, that she had never hinted a breath of it to me, and I rooming with her all along! I wonder how many girls could have done it! Nobody need tell me that a woman can’t keep a secret again!

She sent for Dr.— the next day, and explained to him, before Miss Tripp and me, the whole story. She apologized for the rudeness done to him yesterday; and said that the chief thing that troubled her about the plan was the insult to a clergyman which it involved, but she was driven to it, and she begged his pardon, and hoped he would not judge her harshly. He received her apology kindly, and said he wished that he had known how she had been situated before; he should have been glad to help her if he could in silencing the cruel scandal. I think he believed, when he saw her face, that she spoke simple truth. I think he was a good man.

Well, and so later in the summer there was another wedding-day. It came away from the hot city and Sue’s gossipy tongue, and away from Job, who was always vowing vengeance, but has never found his way to wreak it yet. It came with Long Meadow sunlight and flowers, at home, in our little front-parlor—it seemed so strange, you know, that Davie should ever be in my home—and he looked so proud of Martie, and Martie so content with him! I think it was the sweetest, stillest wedding that I ever saw. I think it made me very happy—at least—yes, I think

## At Bay

it did. It was so pleasant to know that I never should have to call her Poor Martie any more.  
Happy little Martie!

By-the-way, you may be sure that we sent for little Miss Tripp to come out, and that she came.

Now, since mother died, and I have been at home keeping house—since there has been so much to do, and I get tired and cry a little sometimes by myself when the children have been naughty or sick—sometimes, when life looks very different from what I used to think it would be—from what I suppose all girls think it will be at some time or other—I believe it does me good—I'm sure it ought to—to think of Davie's wife—

(There were one or two words more, but so blotted and blurred by a large round mark that I struck them out as unintelligible.)

## DOHERTY

If you *want* to see the inside of a station, you'd ought to have been here last night. It isn't often, ma'am, there is a night that would be suitable for you. I don't think there's been half a dozen this winter that I'd want you round if you was my daughter or my sister—begging your pardon, ma'am, as the best way I can put it to you to express my meaning and the feeling that a man has about such things.

Ladies drop in of an errand now and then—you ain't the first. Curious errands, too. One, she wanted to circulate a total abstinence pledge; and another, she offered to pay the salary of a chaplain. She brought a specimen with her. Most I remember of him is what a little chap he was. Then I remember three coming in a squad to teach the women how to darn stockings. And one—but she was young—she brought a package of tracts, on pink paper. Then we've had 'em bring sandwiches, and hymn-books, and laylocks, and other singular things.

Most of 'em that drop in have that way about 'em as though the officers were a-locking these folks up here for their own personal gratification. Can't seem to get it into their heads! I always like to be polite to ladies, too, myself. Then, another thing. They're bent on it, these creeturs ain't past making over. Want to give 'em old clothes and get 'em work; set 'em up in little shops, and that. Shops! There isn't a man here once a month that would set under a roof, if you'd give him a salary for it.

Why, once we used to give 'em soup. That was last winter. It didn't work. We don't do it now. But the city had a soup-day here one while, and a fish firm down on Atlantic Wharf said we might have their heads. So we told the men, if they'd go down and get the heads it would make their soup so much the richer. Don't you see? Now we couldn't get a man-jack of 'em to stir. Not one. They'd rather go without than take the trouble. They're all so. All of a piece. And the women—well the women—

Upon my word, I wish you *had* been here last night. I've been lieutenant in this station for twelve years, and I don't think I ever felt as I did last night. It's puckery kind of work this—like taking alum on your tongue. After a year or so a man feels himself wizzling and toughening up in his feelings. Can't afford to have feelings down here, more 'n you can afford to stand round a burning house in cotton clothes. It only scorches you and don't make any odds to the house.

Ever see our books? No? Well just you look here, if you please. Just count those pages. Will you? From there to there. We took in all those in December. In the month of December, 1876, we had in this one station two thousand two hundred and fifty-two men and women. Of course, there's the usual share of arrests. There's Mahoney, and Jones, and Sullivan, and Pete Cartwright, and Julia Henderson right under my finger, all arrests. All drunk. But most of 'em are vagrancies in the winter time. You see it was pretty cold last December, especially nights. And then we're careful about our officers. Don't allow kicking, and no more swearing at 'em than circumstances require. These creeturs get such things round among themselves. They have a fancy for this station, maybe. I don't know how that is. We mean to be humane on this corps. That's our theory. Some of our officers have a very gentlemanly way. Not that we think it makes much difference. I tell you, madam (you may better understand it at the outset), I don't know what your intentions are, of course—but ladies come with so many charitable and curious designs which it seems a pity to disappoint; but I tell you the folks that get into these places are a hopeless lot. They're folks without a chance. Most of us have a chance, I reckon, in this world, some time or nuther; even them poor devils. But by the time they get here their chance is as

dead as John Brown's body.<sup>57</sup> I don't say there's never an exception. Now, there was that creetur last night. Maybe if somebody'd taken her in hand several years ago—if a lady with the way you seem to have—(I hope you'll excuse me, ma'am, but there is a difference in a lady's way, such as I think you'd have to be a man to do a pretty rough man's work, like mine, for instance, to understand so clearly as you might). I wished last night, I will confess, that there'd been a lady here. It did occur to me to go home for my wife. But I never bring my wife into the station-house.

Here's the entry—one of the last ones I mean. See!

*"D:—Doherty, Ellen. February 20<sup>th</sup>, 1877. Vagrancy."* When I get time, I'm going to count up how often that woman's name has been on these books. But it would take a good deal of time. It's some years.

I remember very well the first time she came. Don't know how I happen to. There's such a lot of young girls. And pretty ones, too. This one was more than commonly good-looking—an Irish girl. She had a dark style and was paler than most of 'em. I think it must have been five years ago. It was the first time she'd ever been arrested. She took on dreadfully about it. She hadn't begun to drink then. And what she was taken up for had never happened before. It was the first time, she said. Someways, I remember, I believed her. Seemed as if she'd break her heart. Hadn't any folks, she said. Her'n were dead. She cooped up in a little heap in the corner, on the floor, that night, and sat crying all the night. It wasn't till nigh morning that the other women could get a word out of her. If I remember straight, we had an uncommonly rough lot of women-folks on that night. I wouldn't have put her in among 'em; but there's no other way. I never get quite used to that—shutting up a young thing with an old one.

Well, so she was sent to the House for thirty days; and by and by she was back again. She came of her own accord that time. Said she couldn't get anything to do. Seems to me she said she wanted honest work. They do say it once in a while. And it was a pretty cold night. She came for a place to sleep.

So after that we got pretty well used to her; but mostly after she begun to drink, and alter, like the rest. It don't take long. Their own mothers wouldn't know 'em mostly in three years or so; less, maybe, as it happens.

Well, yes. Our rule is: come a fortnight and you go. When one comes steady for two weeks every night, then it is a case of vagrancy and we can send 'em to the almshouse. But Doherty, she was pretty careful. She grew smart as she grew worse. If she got taken up, it wasn't for a long pull. Never knew her in the House at the longest more than three months at a time. And when she come to lodge, she steered pretty clear of the law—coming for a few nights, you see, and then off again on her own ways. They're more afraid of the almshouse than they are of hell, these folks.

So she got to be a pretty old customer—always come to this station. I don't know but that was my fault. Once I give her a pair of my wife's shoes. It was one January morning, twelve below zero. She hadn't any stockings, only a pair of old rubbers, and her bare feet came through onto the pavement, and it was pretty icy. I suppose I might have lost my place for it. Eh! Cap'n? But I don't think Doherty ever told of me.

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<sup>57</sup>“John Brown's Body” was the original title of the “Battle Hymn of the Republic.” John Brown (1800-1859) advocated the abolition of slavery, and was hanged for trying to incite a slave rebellion. He played an important role in sparking the Civil War.



“The young woman’s account”: Writing Women’s Sexuality

So you see, ma’am, we’ve all got kind of dependent on her. Should have missed the creetur, I dare say, if she hadn’t come. You get so used to the same thing, you know, much as you do to your temper or your whiskers. She’d come in, and I’d say: “Well, Doherty, back again?” And generally I went down myself to see her in the cell. Sometimes I do, with the old hands. She grew to be a pretty tough case, Doherty did. And yet there was always something I liked about Doherty.

You see she used to sing. Sometimes they do. And once or twice I’ve had a chap here who could draw portraits of the rest. Scrawl the walls all over, if he wasn’t watched. One of the worst cases we ever had on these books, his name was Gaffrey—Peter Gaffrey. Killed an officer, finally, with a horse-shoe. He used to talk Latin when he was drunk, and some other language. I thought it was Dutch; but the chief heard him, and said he guessed it was Greek. The fellow used to get the rest all ranged round like an audience, and then go at it. But generally they talk religion. It’s more popular.

This Doherty that I speak of, she had a beautiful voice. I’m something of a judge of music. My wife sings in a choir in a Baptist church. There was a lady happened here once—wanted to get some scholars for her Bible-class, she said; and she heard Doherty sing. It was on one of her sprees. I would n’t have had a lady heard Doherty sing that night, if I’d been in time to stop it. None of the men are often quite like that. This lady, she grew so faint we had to carry her away. She didn’t come again. It was early—six o’clock in the morning, too—and she’d come all the way from the West End to see the women before they were let out. We let them go at six o’clock. They don’t get in very thick till toward midnight. By one o’clock we’re pretty full.

Time and again I’ve set up here looking over the books at dead of night, alone along with an officer or so, and heard the call go up from a man somewhere down below:

“Doherty! Sing us to sleep, Doherty! Sing us to sleep!”

And then Doherty from the women’s cell would hear them, through the wall, and she’d begin. And the fighting and the swearing and all the horrid noise would quiet down; and, true enough, I think they slept. I had a Newfoundland dog that went to sleep when my wife played the cabinet organ. Sometimes that woman would sing enough to make your flesh creep. She’d lost all her looks by that time. But she never sang so when she was sober. And sometimes she’d strike up a pretty thing, as clean and sweet as the hush-a-by my own baby hears, ma’am, from my own wife’s lips. Sometimes she sang “Auld Lang Syne” or “Home, Sweet Home”; and once that woman picked up a song called the “Three Fishers.” Maybe you know it. You could hear her all over this great building:

“For men must work, and women must weep,  
-----And women must weep.”-----<sup>58</sup>

“Don’t you ever sing any hymns, Doherty?” I says to her one night—more to see what she would say, you know. But she looked at me and made me no answer, and passed on. Doherty never quite lost her ways, like other women, when she was herself. Sometimes she was quite manageable and gentle in her ways. That night she did n’t sing at all. Then men kept it up, off and on, all night: “Is Doherty in to-night?” “Hasn’t Doherty come?” “Sing us to sleep, Doherty! Sing us to sleep!”

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<sup>58</sup> “Three Fishers” is a traditional English folksong, set to music by composers such as John Hullah and Sir Henry Rowley Bishop, and included by Charles Kingsley in his collection *Water Babies* (1864).

But she wouldn't open her lips; and when morning came—it was a snowy morning—and I let her out, she tugged a little, this way, on my sleeve, as she went out, and said: “Good-bye, Lieutenant,” like a lady. She didn't show herself again for a long while after that.

This winter she's come pretty often. In December she come nigh her fortnight's term; but she cleared out just in time. Then again this month. It's been a pretty cold winter, and the woman seemed sickly. I felt sorry for her. She'd grown unpleasant looking, and she coughed. I don't think she had any place of her own this season, anywhere. We couldn't find out. The Cap'n and I both felt a kind of interest, you see, she'd been on our books so long. It was only natural. But I do assure you, ma'am, there is nothing to be done for such a case. Nothing whatever. I wouldn't look like that, if I was you. You can't help it. Him that permits 'em, He strikes 'em off our books, now and then, into His, madam; and best for Him and them and us, I take it, when it happens.

Now, last night, the 23d of February, that woman, she'd just made out her fourteenth night consecutive; and I had it planned to send her to Tewksbury to-day. She'd be warm in the poor-house, at least, and sure of her rations. Cap'n and I both felt glad of it when we saw her stagger in. He said: “We've got her this time.” And I said: “Here again, Doherty?”

I went up to speak to her, for I felt a little sorry, too, knowing it was the last time. For you couldn't understand how familiar their faces grow, nor the kind of feeling that an officer gets about them, now and then.

There is the entry just as I put it down, after so many times.

“*No. 31 (she came in rather early)—No. 31. D:—Doherty, Ellen. Vagrancy. Sick.*” For we saw at once that she was pretty sick. She'd been beating about in the storm. The snow was all over her. I noticed she had on a clean calico dress. She stood just where you're standing, ma'am, while I made the entry. It took the snow some time to melt, for it had sleeted some. She looked almost as if she was in a white dress, she was so covered. She had her hair done up neat, too.

I thought I'd go and see her in the cell myself. So I went down. She walked very slow and seemed weak. “Tired, Doherty?” said I.

“Lieutenant,” said she, “folks used to call me Nell. Nobody called me Doherty till I begun to come to the police-station. I don't think anybody called me that till I'd been into the House,” says she.

Then I said, for I thought I'd pacify her, if I could: “Are you sick to-night, Nell?”

“Oh, my God!” says she—just like that. Then she threw up her arms over her head, and began to sob and take on. But she didn't swear. She felt too sick, I take it. So we put her in with the rest, and she got into the corner and sat crying.

It was not till toward midnight that she begun. They didn't get well in and quieted before that. But every now and then the men would call: “Sing us to sleep, Doherty! Where is Doherty? Doherty! Sing us to sleep!”

The storm set in hard toward midnight. It beats heavily here upon the office windows, as you see, ma'am; and we get a pretty clean sweep of the wind, on account of the street running to the wharves. I sent down once to ask how Doherty seemed; but the officer reported that she was quiet, and he wished the rest were. They'd all set in, men and women, he said, in concert, a-crying out: “Sing us to sleep, Doherty!”

Pretty soon she began. I could hear her plain above the roaring of the storm. She began—Doherty began—that—that poor—miserable—creetur—she that had once been a woman like other womanfolks—excuse me, ma'am; but she's been on our books a good many years.

“The young woman’s account”: Writing Women’s Sexuality

And I’ve heard her sing such things! I never looked to be taken by surprise, as Doherty took me. You’re not surprised very easy, in such a place as this, at anything your fellow-sinners do.

But about midnight, when the storm was at its thick and the cells were growing still, Doherty, she sat up and began to sing a hymn. She sang

“Shall we gather at the river.”<sup>59</sup>

My boy sings that at Sunday-school, and my wife, she strikes it up the first thing on the cabinet organ every Sunday night. Doherty sang it all through:

“At the margin of the River,  
Washing up its silver spray,  
We shall walk and worship ever,  
All the happy, golden day.”

Those are the words. I thought perhaps you wouldn’t know them. Folks sing them a great deal in the Baptist church.

Before you could have cocked a pistol it was as quiet as the grave all through this place. The officers looked at one another. All the men waked up. The women, they got together in a heap about her. The Cap’n said to me: “*Doherty’s* singing *hymn-tunes!*” I said I thought we’d go down and see; and down we went.

When we looked in at the grating, I wish, ma’am, you could have seen those men—ragged, rough, red, drunk. Some of ’em taken in awful crimes. No, I don’t wish you had seen them. But there they set, as silent as a row of angels on the Judgment day, a-listening to hear that woman sing. One and another, they said: “Hush! Hush!” And one fellow said: “I used to sing that song myself.” He was up for assault and battery. Badly beaten, too, himself, about the face. He crept along the wall, I noticed, on his knees, to get where he could hear her better. When she stopped, he hollered out:

“Give us some more, Doherty!”

And the rest said:

“Doherty, give us another psalm-tune!”

But one of the women said:

“Come, Nell! Sing us to sleep with the hymns.”

So then she began again; and she gave it to ’em, one upon another, fast and clear. Heaven knows where the creetur learned ’em. At some Protestant Sunday-school, maybe, where she’d wandered in at holidays. They go a good deal, on account of the Christmas presents.

We all got round her there—the men inside and the officers without—and listened for awhile. I don’t think I ever heard her sing so in all my life. Doherty had a fine voice, and no mistake. If she’d been respectably born, she’d have been a great singer, that woman, I take it; and folks would have been running to the opera and to concert-halls to hear her.

So there she sat and sung. She set up in one corner, with her chin upon her hands, and noticed nobody; but stared straight on before her. She sang “Nearer, my God, to Thee,” and “Depths of Mercy”; and she sung “I heard the voice of Jesus say” and “Love at Home,” and all

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<sup>59</sup> “Shall We Gather at the River” was composed by Reverend Robert Lowry in 1864 and published in *Happy Voices* in 1865.

Doherty

those. And all the men and all the women listened. And I saw the Cap'n draw his hand acrost his eyes. And I'll own it was too much for *me*. I will, indeed.

To see her there, letting out those holy words so trustfully, as you might say, ma'am, as if she had as much right to 'em as anybody—that—poor—wretched—Madam, it was enough to break your heart to hear her. I could n't help remembering how pretty she had been and young, and how she took on the first night she ever come to us.

Pretty soon I come away up-stairs—for she unmanned me so, before the men; and I set down here and had it out alone. But while I was setting here I heard a lull, and one of the Irish boys called out:

“Give us the one more, Doherty! Then ye can take yer sleep yerself!”—

And then, ma'am, she began, quite low and in a faint voice, and very sweet, and she sung

“Jesus, Lover of my soul.”

She sung it this way, singing louder now and then:

“Let *me* to Thy bosom fly,  
While the billows near *me* roll . . .  
Hide *me*, O Thou Saviour, hide.”

And in the midst of the verse she stopped. The men called to her, and the women; and the Cap'n said:

“Give us the rest, Nell!”

I was rather glad he called her Nell just then; for when we got in, wondering what it all meant and hushing up the women, ma'am, as best we could, we found her lying turned a little on her side, with her face against the wall, quite dead.

It doesn't happen so often, ma'am, that we ever get quite toughened to it. And being a woman makes it a little different. I wish you'd seen her. Upon my soul, I do. I wish some woman had been there of a different sort from them about her. We don't often have a prettier nor a more modest and more gentle creetur than Doherty was the first night we ever saw her here. I wish you could have heard her sing the hymns.

## CHAPTER FIVE

“THOUSANDS OF PALE WOMEN KNOW”: WRITING WOMEN AND THE CIVIL WAR

A Sacrifice Consumed  
My Refugees  
Margaret Bronson

## INTRODUCTION

Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's Civil War writing began with what she saw: a "country dark with sorrowing women," and with what she felt, the loss of a young man who was her friend and suitor (*Chapters* 96). It is telling that when she describes the first stages of her literary career, she does so in a chapter titled "War-time: First Stories." The war and writing were indelibly connected for her; her earliest success, publishing "A Sacrifice Consumed" in *Harper's Magazine*, and her greatest success, the best-selling novel *The Gates Ajar* (1868) are narratives shaped by the war. The Civil War (1861-1865), as she notes in her memoirs, "swept up and filled the scene" (*Chapters* 72). However, the scenes she considered featured women. During the war, some women found ways to break away from traditional roles for women and distinguish themselves in many fields, including medicine and commerce. As Larry Eggleston notes, women became nurses and doctors, but also soldiers and spies. While she chose to contribute with her pen, Phelps created female protagonists willing to pick up a gun and head into battle, or pick up some bandages and head to the army hospital. Mourning women and those dealing with injured loved ones are at the centre of "A Sacrifice Consumed," included below, *The Gates Ajar* and her later novel, *The Story of Avis* (1877). Just as Phelps wrote *The Gates Ajar* to "ameliorate suffering from women who had lost husbands, sons, and fiancés in the Civil War" (Cognard-Black 117), "A Sacrifice Consumed" works to provide purpose for the deaths, and, therefore, potentially comfort the grief-stricken.

Forever affected by the loss and suffering it caused, Phelps continued to be influenced by the war and its impact on society throughout her career. Henry Vedder notes that *The Gates Ajar* "boldly attacked problems that the pulpits and theological chairs feared or ignored, and while it did not say the last word on any of them, it did in many cases say what was to most people the first word of comfort they had ever heard" (191). Naomi Sofer suggests that Phelps's decision to bring the suffering of the war into *The Story of Avis*, "points to her engagement with the rhetorical uses of the war that had become commonplace by 1877. The impulse to cast the war as both a catalyst for cultural production and a standard of execution is misguided, Phelps suggests, because it masks the true horror and intense suffering revealed in Avis's vision" (192). The war would always be for her a site of loss, and her sympathy for its victims is palpable in this chapter's stories of a woman in mourning, a woman busy healing, and a woman in battle.

## THE STORIES

"A Sacrifice Consumed" was published in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 28 (Jan. 1864): 235-40.

"My Refugees" appeared in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 29 (Nov. 1864): 754-63.

"Margaret Bronson" appeared in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 31 (Sept. 1865): 498-504.

## A SACRIFICE CONSUMED

A low room, scanty but neat furniture, a small stove shooting red beams into the growing shadows; a slight, stooping figure at the window, using up the lingering light for her busy needle. The fingers, pricked and thin they were, moved with a nervous rapidity, now and then pushing away impatiently the stray locks of brown hair that would wave and ripple down on her forehead in a pretty, girlish way, strangely in contrast with the face that looked so old and care-worn. A shrinking mouth and eyes that looked—well, they *might* have power, you would say, after watching them a while; to-night they were only dull. This was the picture. She stitched ceaselessly on a silk robe, whose richness seemed to laugh at the meagre room and its poorly-draped occupant. Very fast she sewed, the work must be done to-night; but the thoughtless western light crept away to its home in the hills, and left her. She laid down her sewing, put her hands to her strained eyes a moment, and sighed wearily. But there was no time for rest, and in a moment her lamp was burning and her face bent again over her work. When it was finished she tied on her bonnet, folded the costly silk with care, and started to go out. She turned round, however, before she blew out her lamp, to glance over the room; it looked bare and lonely: no voice to speak to her out of the stillness, no kind eyes to pity her weariness.

By one of those sudden surges of feeling which rush upon us when the physical strength is overtaxed, the long pent-up suffering that her toil and desolation had made burst into a wail. These constant drudging days—for what were they? To warm, and clothe, and feed herself, and herself only—to work, eat, sleep, and work again, alone. Was *this* life? As in a picture the dragging years came before her, and loomed up in the future mercilessly.

Oh, these hours of dark prophecy!—sterner than the sorrowful Past, more bitter than the troubled Present, what wonder is it that when their cold hand touches us we shrink and faint beneath it? The pale woman bowed her face in her hands and cried out, sharply,

“Alone, all alone! No home, no love—always, always! O Christ!”

I think He heard her, for He knew she loved Him. The word seemed to give her strength, and the spasm passed away in a few moments. Some thought seemed to strike her which she repelled—a picture of some face perhaps it was, which she ought not to see just then. She put her pain back, down deep into her heart, to go on with her life and trust to Him.

It was almost dark when she reached the street door; but her errand must be done, and drawing her veil closely about her face, the seamstress stepped out hurriedly on the pavements.

I am giving you no sickly sentimentalism when I let you into the secret of her moment of pain. The heart of every woman calls to God out of its own solitude, in such a life as hers, with a bitterness He only can fathom. You shall not blame her nor pronounce her weak, that she beats her wings against the prison door and cries for her mate to open the cage and sing to her. And, I am sure, the humblest birds can make melody which God loves to hear. They may build their nests among the low grasses and daisies; but perhaps the song is sweeter then, for it has so far to rise.

This woman took her loneliness as God-sent, and bore it, for the most part, healthfully. He must have some object for her existence; she would work out the problem with tireless faith. This night, as she passed by brightly-lighted houses in her walk, and saw the home groups, like distant fairy pictures, through the windows, the happy mothers' faces, and little children climbing on their fathers' knees—she could not help it, the remembrance of that desolate room was fresh—she choked and clasped her hands tightly together, then wiping away the tears,

## A Sacrifice Consumed

angrily hurried on faster than before. The errand accomplished, holding fast the scanty price of her labor, she turned to go home.

It grew darker. People peered curiously under her bonnet as she passed the shop windows. One man stopped when he saw her, turned, and followed. She walked faster, so did he; she turned a sudden corner, but started and screamed slightly, as she heard his step behind her and a hand touched her shoulder.

“Ruth!”

“Oh, John! Mr. John! I didn’t know it was you.”

“Did I frighten you? I am sorry. I will make up for it now by seeing you safe home, if you will let me.”

He drew her trembling hand through his arm quietly, and walked on with her.

“Why are you out so late?” he asked.

“I had to take back Mrs. Alden’s dress, and it wasn’t finished till dark,” said Ruth; and as a vision of the lonely room came up again at this she hurried to change the subject.

“Are you just out of the store?” she asked.

“Yes; as I’m the only clerk, you know, I can not be spared early. I get tired.”

“Do you?” said the seamstress, quickly, with a smothered tenderness. “I am very sorry.”

They were passing a street lamp just then, and the light fell full upon her face. You would hardly have known it for the same that bent over the ceaseless needle in the darkening room. Her cheeks were rosy with exercise and excitement, her eyes black and intense with feeling, as her companion turned to look at her.

“Are you sorry?” he said, simply. “I am very glad.”

They walked on in silence a few moments.

“This is a hard life for you,” he said, at length, “and I don’t like to have you out so evenings. I wish I could take care of you.”

She made no answer.

“Ruth,” he said, stopping under the shadow of the steps as they reached the house, and looking down into her eyes with his own honest blue ones, “*could* you love me? Could you let me take care of you always?”

She did not understand him at first. How should she? She had never known since she kissed her dead mother long years ago what it was to hear words of love. She looked up half frightened into his face. He repeated it slowly, surely. She saw it all.

“Oh, John, can you want *me*?”

“I want you to be my wife, Ruth. Why, little woman, don’t look so scared. Your eyes are on fire. Tell me. How is it?”

She gave him her hands, her poor, toil-worn hands, and while he grasped them fast she hid her face and cried. A quaint way it was of telling him she loved him, but the young man understood it; and when a moment after she raised her head and looked up at him the plain face seemed to him beautiful as an angel’s.

Just before he left her he opened his wallet, and took from it a bit of yellow paper, unfolded it, and held up a ring; it was of old-fashioned gold-work, with a strange red stone in the shape of an anchor.

“It was my mother’s wedding-ring,” he said. “I’ve kept it as if it were holy. No woman has ever touched it or seen it since she died. She would like to have you wear it, Ruth.”



Ruth took it, kissed it reverently, then handed it back for him to place it upon her finger, looking up with a sort of worship into the manly face, and wondering that he thought her worthy to wear it.

After he had gone she went up stairs blindly, and stumbled over one of her fellow-boarders on the landing. The woman looked at the seamstress in amazement.

“What’s the matter?” she said. “Why don’t you walk straight? Your cheeks are so red I didn’t know you.”

Ruth only smiled in answer, went in to her own room, and shut the door. Then this little woman did a most unpoetic thing. She sat down on the floor by the stove, put her head on a chair, and cried again. I doubt if even John would have understood these tears. A wanderer suddenly finding home; a discord swelling up quickly into unimagined harmony. Do you wonder that when she saw herself and her life so the joy should be too much for her? The dreariness was dreary no longer, because away in another such room she knew he thought of her. The loneliness was lonely no longer, for she remembered the sound of his voice when he told her he loved her. “He loved her!” She said it over, kissing the quaint ring.

But I shall tell you no more of this. I can not let you into that hidden sanctuary of her heart—a heart which thirsted like a desert for the water-brooks, and found them all at once in a burst of sunshine.

A new world opened to the little seamstress. Her day’s toil seemed short and easy. The light and air were strangely fresh and beautiful. Her own dwarfed house-plants grew green and blushed into tiny flowers. She bent over them in wonder, and thought they had never bloomed so before. A bit of chick-weed crept up through the pavement by the door; she stooped one day and touched it caressingly, thinking it sprang up for her. On her long walks—a little longer, perhaps, that she might pass John’s store and look through the open door, or step modestly in to buy a spool of thread—on these walks she watched the gay ladies with their haughty lips and discontented eyes, and pitied them that they had no such joy as hers, thinking, poor simple heart, that since those matchless days in Eden no woman was ever so happy. Then, when the work must be carried home at night, John kept his promise to “take care of her.” With her hand upon his arm, and his cheerful voice in her ear, the dark crowded streets became like corridors of arching trees, and marble pillars, with low winds, and the song of a nightingale.

One evening she stood before the glass in the little closet which she used for a bedroom, and looking at herself, wondered at the happy face she saw there. She dressed with care, for John was coming to see her. A dark-brown *de laine* was the best her scanty wardrobe contained; it would have been ugly on some women, but it seemed to suit the quiet little figure perfectly.<sup>60</sup> You would not wish to see her in a brighter dress. The room which served her as parlor, kitchen, and work-room looked less bare and meagre to-night than formerly. She took off the cover of her little cooking-stove, and the ruddy light brightened the dingy carpet, and softened the sharp outlines of the furniture, and danced among the leaves of the plants on the window-sill. Among them was one geranium of a pure pink, which had budded on the day of that memorable walk with John. She loved it for that reason. Coming out from the closet she stopped to look around her room; it was pleasant, she thought. She went to the geranium and bent over it tenderly. There were several blossoms on the stalk, and she held one up against her dark dress. A thought struck her as she looked at it. John loved flowers: would he think her *very* silly if she, with her

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<sup>60</sup> Short for muslin-de-laine, *de laine* is a light textile made of wool.

## A Sacrifice Consumed

pale, pinched face, should wear it? She hesitated, then broke it off quickly and stole back to the glass like a guilty child.

I doubt if I can imagine how shy the little seamstress was about so simple a thing, how she took the flower up, then put it down, then looked at her face and sighed; then glanced timidly around, as if some one were watching her; and finally laid the delicate blossoms in the folds of her hair, and with only a momentary look at herself hurried away from the glass, shut the door hard, and stood blushing like a culprit. A quick knock caught her in the midst of the blush, and deepened it.

She formed a pleasant picture, with her face made almost young by the tint of the flower, and the rippling of her hair, though these were in strong contrast with the stooping figure in its dull dress, and her odd, old-fashioned little ways of greeting John. Perhaps he thought her handsome. Why shouldn't he? She was all his own, you know, and loved him.

"I like it," he said, touching with his finger the flower in her hair. "I want you to wear some bit of colour oftener; it makes you so pretty, Ruth."

Her face for the moment, as she turned it up to him, was really girlish. The tired heart was bewildered with the rest of this new love. She listened to him dreamily, and fancied she had slipped back through the years—the wretched, toiling years—and was playing among the buttercups and daisies at her mother's door. All happiness, real or imaginary, took, to her, this far-off likeness. Is there not with all of us some such simple thing which weaves itself into our ideal joys? The gleam of a sunset—the lull of a drowsy wind—the chime of a distant bell—a something which we catch and lose again, but without which our vision was imperfect?

"I brought you a ribbon," John said; "it's just this same color. I wanted to make my little woman look as well as any of them."

He unfolded a paper and held up a rose-colored neck-tie. With the quick eye of a dry-goods clerk he had chosen the latest style, and rich silk. Ruth looked at it a moment without saying a word: then,

"Oh, John! I'm too homely for so beautiful a thing."

"I guess I know best about that," he said, with a smile, and laid it upon her lap. Her look was thanks.

"Oh, dear!" she said, in a little restful tone: "I thought every one would always think I was old and homely; and I though the room would always be lonely and dark, and I'd never have any one to love me."

He held out his hand to her; she took it, and crept up to him timidly. The room seemed all in a glow of heat and dancing lights; the broken chairs, and patched curtains, and faded chintz were bright as the tapestry of a palace. She hid her face and felt his hand stroking her hair.

"Oh, John! John!"

She knew she was never to be tired again; she knew she was never more to be alone.

In a truthful story of such a life as hers you must not expect excitement or change of scene. I can give you no whispering winds and deep skies, no wild flowers or clinging mosses about this quiet figure. I must show her to you in the little room where such as she—God help them!—must always live, and love, and suffer.

The happy months flew by quickly. Ruth wondered, as she waited one evening for John, and thought over the summer, to find that July was drawing to its golden close. She wondered also if all of life would be as bright—looking forward, it dazzled her.

“Thousands of pale women know”: Writing Women and the Civil War

The soft summer twilight had not yet crept into the room when John came. Ruth was sitting by the window. She wore a dress of purple muslin, printed with a delicate spray of white—an extravagance she had indulged in to please John. The pink ribbon, too, was tied at her throat. The sunlight, by some strange mistake, had happened to slip into the dark street on its way to the west, and fell through the window on the little seamstress’s brown hair, and made her eyes very happy as she turned them toward the opening door. John stopped an instant with a choking in his throat when he saw her.

“You are early,” she said, coming up to him. “I am afraid I shall have to send you back.” Her smile faded, however, when she saw his face distinctly; it looked pale and sad.

“What is it, John?”

He answered her anxious inquiry by holding her tightly in his arms a moment, and kissing her forehead. Then he said, “Nothing;” and sat down by her. Ruth began to talk in her quiet way, and he listened.

“It is so strange,” she said, at length, “to know I have you always to come to. Life is so happy now.”

To her surprise he did not answer for a moment, then covered his face with his hands. She thought she had troubled him in some way, and looked grieved.

“Ruth,” he said, suddenly, “could you get along without me for a while?”

“*Without you?*”

“I mean—I mean, if I went into the army.”

“Into the army, John!”

“I’ve been thinking a great deal lately,” he said, in a firm but tender voice, “of our brave soldiers, and I don’t think it’s right to stay at home—I don’t think it’s *right*. Our country needs me—ours, yours and mine, Ruth—and so I’ve come to you to know if you can let me go.”

She shivered, and dropped her hands in his with a bitter cry. For some moments neither spoke. Then he said, in a reverent tone:

“I want to please God in this thing. I think He wishes it.”

“I can’t, I can not give you up, John!”

“Not for the country, Ruth?”

“No one needs you as much as I, how *could* I be alone again?”

He took her gently to him as if she had been a child, and they talked a long time in the twilight. I can not tell you all John said, but his words at last aroused her. It *was* a brave heart, though it was a woman’s. Her face grew calm, and she lifted it to his with a smile.

“You may go.”

“God bless you for this, my darling!”

They looked into each other’s eyes a moment—a long look; his were intense with a love that could not be uttered, hers were tender, liquid, filled with no vain regret, but pure as those of a martyr.

So John enlisted and went to camp, but several furloughs were granted him before the time for departure. Ruth had cheerful words, and a trusting face to meet him with always. I do not think he knew what they cost her, though his whole heart blessed her for them. Why should I linger over the parting? Thousands of pale women know its sacredness, and need no picture of that which “entereth within the veil.” It may be months or years since, but still they hear at nightfall the echo and re-echo of the low “good-by”—the last sound of a distant step—the death-like stillness that shall never more be broken.

## A Sacrifice Consumed

It was in August that he went, and her life with its tenfold loneliness went on as in the old days before they were engaged. Only his letters came—full of love and courage. She would sit up till late every night, and cramp her already tired fingers to answer them; writing in her timid, loving way, putting in few words of endearment, except his name. She loved to write that often, and sometimes she would kiss it shyly, or drop a tear on it perhaps, and then try to wipe it off so he should not see the mark. It was curious to see her, when she took out his little picture and looked at it with her large, reverent eyes; and when a distant step was heard in the house she would start as if guilty, and with burning cheeks hide it away. Yet you could not laugh at her. You would have felt more like crying, perhaps.

As the pile of John's cheerful letters increased, and still he was safe and perfectly well, she herself grew more trusting, and began to sing a little at her work. Perhaps he would come home after all.

One night she heard the newsboys' shout of a great battle, and saw an unusual crowd around the bulletins. She stopped to read the rumors of the Maryland battles with a sharp pain at her heart. But John's regiment had not drill enough yet to fight; she would not be anxious. Yet her lips were compressed, and her eyes feverishly bright all day.

Then came the news which stirred the North with glad surprise—of a victory at Antietam. The seamstress thanked God for it as heartily as the gladdest; but every morning she searched the list of killed and wounded; and every day, as no letter came for her, she grew paler, and the lines of her face sharper with pain. At last she saw that John's regiment had been in the fight, but nothing more.

Still the golden days fled away, and the skies were warm and hazy, over that far-off Southern river, but the pale faces turned toward them saw them not. The birds sang with a willful merriment, and the gay autumn flowers grew and smiled in soil that was soaked with human blood. The sparkling hours would pause in their sport to sing no dirge for the dead and to pity no mourner.

Ruth waited, and the mornings brightened, and the evenings faded, but the columns of the papers, though full for others, brought nothing to her.

One day she sat sewing in her room in the afternoon warmth. The sound of carriage-wheels without grew less and less; there were no voices about the house; a strange, oppressive stillness fell suddenly about her. She laid down her work and clasped her hands, straining every nerve to listen for she knew not what.

A step on the stairs, and some one knocked. She said, "Come in," for she could not rise. A man entered and touched his hat respectfully. Ruth recognized him as one of John's company; she had seen him at camp.

"Is this Miss Mason?"

She bowed her head, and pointed to a chair; then clenched her fingers again, and sat looking at him with a sort of fierce courage that surprised the man.

"I've just come home on furlough to git my arm cured up," and he pointed to the sling he wore; "thought mother could do it better than those doctors. Now it's better, and—and I come to tell you that—to tell you—well, he's gone. John Rogers's gone; he got shot at Antietam on Wednesday, just two weeks ago, poor fellow!"

She uttered a long, low cry, and pressed her hand to her heart. Then she sank on the floor, and hid her face in the chair in a crouching, helpless way, moaning plaintively.

“Thousands of pale women know”: Writing Women and the Civil War

The man passed his rough hand over his eyes, and moved uneasily in his chair. “Poor creetur! she’s hurt pretty bad. Hard work this; rather be under fire any time,” he muttered to himself.

There was an innate sense of delicacy in the man, coarse looking as he was, which forbade him to speak; he only sat looking at her in a puzzled way, waiting for her to look up. She did so at last. Her face was very white; she shed no tears; but there was such a beseeching look in her dry eyes, such a crushed, hopeless pressure of her lips as was pitiful to see.

“Tell me about it,” stretching out her hands in a pleading way.

“Why, you see, Miss,” began the man, “he was ’long with Burnside down by the bridge, in the thick of the fight, when a shot hit him in the breast, and he dropped down just by a great tree that’s nigh the bridge, and lay there pretty nigh three hours, I reckon, afore they could get to him. When I’d been off the field myself with this ’ere arm a while some one brought him up, and the surgeon he laid him by me, and says he, ‘Poor fellow! he won’t never get well;’ and when John heard that he just shut his eyes a minute, and I heerd him say, ‘Ruth, Ruth!’ I didn’t quite understand him at first, and thought he was talkin’ about the pain: so I called out and told him ’twouldn’t last long, and he kinder smiled and said ’twarn’t that, ‘but,’ said he, ‘it’s Ruth Mason; and if you get better, as the doctor says you will, when you go home tell her how I died praying for her, and take her back her letters, and tell her I’ll love her just the same in the other world, and that it’s for the country, and God will help her make the sacrifice.’ Them’s the very words, Miss, and after that he didn’t say much, only his mind wandered a bit, and he talked about a room with flowers in it, and something about a pink ribbon too; then he died, and they buried him down by the river, and the boys sorrowed for him, for he was a brave soldier and a kind one, and had a pleasant word for every body.”

Ruth listened to it all; and still she sat with that dumb, entreating face just the same, only the lips quivered now.

In a few moments the man rose awkwardly and said he must go, placing the package of letters on the table. He stopped a moment at the door and looked back, hesitatingly.

“The day afore I come,” he said, “I went to find where they’d laid him, and I see a little blue flower, starry-like, had blowed out close by the grave, and I thought maybe you’d like to know it.”

Ruth put up her hand to take his, and thanked him in a broken voice. Then he went, and she was alone. She took up her letters and kissed them hotly—they were the last thing John had held—staggered to the bed, and buried her face in the pillows.

“Oh, my God!” crying out, sharply, “I loved him so; I loved him so!” repeating it over and over again, as if she would touch infinite mercy by her pleading, to bring back her dead from that far-off heaven where no one *could* need him as much as she did.

So the night came, and she was alone with it.

At last one of the lodgers came in softly and made her a cup of tea. Ruth thanked her in the same broken way she had thanked the soldier, but she could not drink it.

“She lay so still,” the woman said afterward, “kind o’ moaning, and the tears running so fast down her cheeks, and she never wipin’ them off, nor nothin’, and she didn’t touch that tea, for it came down cold next mornin’.”

Well, how can I tell you of the bitter coming back to life, of the dreary days and wakeful nights, and the lonely evenings when the bent form rocked to and fro in the stillness—of the heavy work, and tired fingers, and tears dropping fast on the hand with a ring?

## A Sacrifice Consumed

In her mourning dress, with her sad eyes filled with dark questionings, her patient mouth and her forehead drawn by pain, she looked ten years older. The frost of her life had melted into a few late, golden days, but even those were gone and the winter was cold. There was now no future; all her days “read backward;” for what should she live?

There were still hours at night when she called beseechingly to Death; but he would not hear, and passed her by. John had said this was to be a sacrifice, and that God would help her: so her life should be His, to do with as He pleased, and she would bear it courageously, and love her country all the more for what it had cost her.

There are heroes who take their lives in their hands—their young, happy lives, all bright with dreams of an unknown success, and joyous with tender loves, and calm amidst the roar of musketry, cool amidst the flaming heats, quiet amidst the shrieks of wounded and dying—face death with a smile, and we do them honor. But there are martyrs at humble firesides, who give up more than this. “They empty heart and home of life’s life-love;” who yet go back to their desolate days from which all the beauty, all the fragrance, all the song, has departed, and take them up bravely, working in lowly trust till the Rest comes. On their pale brows also the crown shall glitter.

But Ruth was no philosopher, and she could not always see how it *could* be right—thinking, you know, that she loved her soldier so; and when she gave him up, after all, what did he do for that proud, beautiful flag that could be worth all this suffering? And, groping in the dark, One met her who had himself wept and struggled alone on the hill-sides of Judea for her, and she was still.

Could He be unkind or unfaithful? Could she not watch with Him one hour?

So she lived very patiently at the foot of the altar where the ashes of her sacrifice lay, and knew that God had accepted it for the blessing of her country, herself, and John.

## MY REFUGEES

Dr. Joyce came in while I was giving the Captain his dinner. It was not his hour for visiting my ward, so I put down my gruel-spoon and looked up to see what was the matter.

“Can’t you come out and see to this arrival?” he asked, stopping a few feet in front of me, with his finger on Tom’s pulse, his hand filled with lemonade for Dick, and his eyes on Harry, so economical of his time was our little Doctor. In fact, I do not think that since I came to the hospital I had succeeded in gaining his undivided attention for a single full minute in working hours. I regarded this as an insult at first; but discovering at length how much he depended on these fragmentary notes which he took of his patients, I had learned to hide my diminished head, and consider myself once for all a lesser light in his presence. But there is a natural perversity about me, which in spite of such discipline “still lived.” It was with an instinct for which I do not hold myself at all accountable that I turned away from him with as professional an air as I could assume, and began choking the gruel down the poor Captain’s throat, as if the safety of the army depended on its descent therein, while I asked, in my most business-like tones,

“What is it?”

“Three—a man already gone with typhoid, wife, and a child—refugees.”

“Hum! well?”

“I want you to get hold of the woman and feed her up: she’s a mere shadow.”

“And the man?”

Dr. Joyce looked round the ward; so did I. I had one empty bed. A little pale-faced boy had left it only yesterday, and gone—well to a better rest, I trust; for I found a tiny Testament in his hand when I folded it with the other. It was open, and his finger was on a prayer—one of the old, old prayers which are always new, that his mother had marked for him. I had a fancy for the poor, home-sick fellow, and had looked at his empty bed with something of that feeling with which one goes into the twilight of a room a friend has left dark forever. I shrank from the thought of seeing a stranger there so soon; a very foolish fancy for a hospital nurse, of course, but some of these boys had become friends indeed in the long months I had cared for them. Besides this, I had as much work on hand as it seemed to me I could well attend to without a little larger allowance of strength than usually falls to the lot of womankind, nurses not excepted. There was Mrs. Cruppins had four or five empty beds, though she *was* the last person I should want to go to, to be nursed through a fever; and there was Miss Graves, she could take three more as well as not, even if she did go about her work like a martyr, and turn her ward into a church-vault, with her funereal face and her melancholy and interesting way of sighing over the men. What if the Doctor did prefer, and very naturally, to call on me? there was a limit to all things. So when I looked at him I was going to own up to my hidden depravity, and say that No. 2 didn’t want the new-comer.

The Doctor is a discreet man, and can read the signs of the weather. He gave me a generous half of one of his professional glances, and remarked quietly to a curious young sergeant in the corner who had employed the time of my meditation in asking a volley of questions,

“Yes, half-starved, but thinks only of her husband and child; the infant is more dead than alive.”

Something rose in my throat and choked me.

“What a heathen!”

“Who? I or the typhoid?”

## My Refugees

“Neither of you,” I responded, curtly; “bring him in here.”

The Doctor went away with the least bit of a smile twitching the corners of his mouth. I felt too humble just then to take any notice of it, so I meekly returned to the Captain and his gruel, gave him his powders, tucked him up for a nap, and when Dr. Joyce came back I was ready for him.

A number of these refugees had dropped into our hospital since I had been there, for two-thirds of the poor creatures are fit for nothing but a sick-bed by the time they reach Nashville, and I supposed I knew what to expect. But the sight I saw struck me dumb. Two shrunken, ghost-like figures, their clothes in tatters, covered with mire and blood, their faces so gaunt that, looking at them, a chill crept over me, as if I looked on Death.

But this was not a time to grow nervous. I roused myself with a start, and touched the man’s hand to see if it were flesh and blood. In reply to my words of welcome he thanked me in a feeble sort of way, putting his hand uncertainly to his forehead, like one of failing memory, and leaning heavily against the door. He evidently needed prompt attention, for the fever was far advanced. While the Doctor led him to the bed I had time to notice his short, thickset figure, the shaggy hair falling about his low forehead, and the eyes that still showed honest and kindly, though they were deep-sunken and burned with fever; the scar of an old gun-wound in his neck, and his hands coarse and brown with labor. Before this war had made him what he was, he had evidently been of the poor of the earth. God’s poor, were they? May we have mercy on all such!

He was far too weak to answer questions. I left him sitting wearily on the side of the bed for the Doctor to undress, and turned back to the woman. She was standing where I had left her, with her baby in her arms, her eyes following every motion of her husband’s.

“Come,” I said, “into my room, and I’ll see what I can do for you.”

“And him?” pointing toward the bed.

“You shall come back and see him.”

She followed me slowly, hushing the wail of her half-starved child, but saying nothing to me. Indeed, she seemed to have hardly life enough left to speak. In an incredibly short time she and the child were washed and dressed in sundry garments of my own, which, though they could not be said to fit in the most perfect manner conceivable, especially on the baby, had at least the advantage of being clean. After they were fed and rested, I had for the first time a critical look at the woman. Slight, and worn, as the Doctor said, to a shadow; stooping shoulders, consumptive chest, and large, work-worn hands; a very pale face, one of the palest I ever saw except in death, with thin, dark hair lying against her temples, where I could see the great purple veins, and eyes which had once been bright black, but now were dulled and sunken. Out of them, when they were raised to mine, came a look so dumb with suffering, so dark with utter hopelessness, that I could not bear to meet it. It never changed. She smiled at me when I brought her baby fresh milk from the kitchen, or tended the little thing while she ate herself; she thanked me; her thin, quavering voice grown quite sweet with gratitude, but the dreariness of that steady look never varied by so much as a momentary gleam of light or softness. It reminded me of a picture I have somewhere seen, to which the artist had given the rather indefinite title of “Desolate;” but which, nevertheless, was a spirited thing, and had staid by me—the figure of a woman in relief against a stormy sky; around her a desert beach strewn with wrecks; her hair blown darkly about her face, and her eyes turned to the waste of waters: a lonely sea-bird startled from the cliffs, dipping into



the foam of a chilly, green wave at her feet, and behind the purple line of water that bounded her vision the setting of a blood-red sun.<sup>61</sup>

Perhaps you smile at my fancy. I think the woman herself might have done so had she known it. Certainly she would not have comprehended it. She sat, quietly rocking her baby, her hands folded over its little fingers, her eyes on its face.

“You have had a hard journey?” I questioned, gently.

“Yes.”

“Was it very long?”

“Yes.”

She looked at me then a moment without speaking. I understood her.

“You do not wish to talk about it now,” I said. “I will not trouble you with any questions.”

“Thank you.”

She recommenced her low lullaby, and while I stood watching her somebody knocked at the door. It was Tim, the errand-boy. He delivered his message after his usual fashion, balancing himself first on one foot, then on the other, regarding me meanwhile with half-closed eyes, and giving his bushy head a series of little nods with an air of authority peculiarly pleasing.

“Davy Brown’s heart’s broke for his dinner, an’ the sargint says his bandages ’s come off, an’ he wants you double-quick; an’ Pat Mullins he’s ben howlin’ over his arm this hour.”

Being serenely conscious that I had been absent but twenty minutes I answered his innuendo only by a withering look, closed the door softly, for my ideas of babies being rather vague I was not prepared to state whether the creaking of a latch would start one of those infantile choruses I live in such constant terror of or not, so I thought it best to be on the safe side. The hopeful Tim whistled on before me down the stairs, and I went back to my work, with my heart for the first time deserting my boys, and wandering to my room and its pale-faced occupant.

It was a busy afternoon. Brown must have his dinner, the howling of Pat the indefatigable must be stopped, and I must go back to the sergeant’s arm. A solitary rebel in the corner took an hour of my time for his bandages and ablutions, spinning it out with remonstrances and complaints so many, and various, and profane, that I felt a strong desire to pull the sheet up over his head, tie it down at the four corners of the bed, and leave him there to struggle and stifle and swear at his own sweet will. There was a favourite drummer-boy, too, whose eyes asked mutely for help—a little patient fellow whom I had taken into my heart from the first day he came to me. I always had to time myself when I was caring for him, for fear I should be accused of partiality. Then some one had been awake all the night before, and must be read into a nap; and then there were letters to be written, and medicines to mix and choke down innumerable throats, and windows to open and windows to shut, and business with the matron, and messages to the doctor, and then at last suppers to get, and supper to eat.

My refugee had found her way down again to her husband. He was tossing now on his bed, delirious with the fever. There was little to do for him, however, and I saw she was neither a fussy nor an ignorant nurse, but sat quite still with one arm around her baby who slept, and the other attending to the sick man’s every want; so I let her be. There was a bit of a room next mine,

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<sup>61</sup> Phelps probably means the painting “Desolation” (1836), the fifth and final panel in American artist Thomas Cole’s major work, *The Course of Empire*. In it, a lone woman faces the wreck of a mighty empire.

## My Refugees

which had belonged to a nurse who was off duty, and home last week with slow fever. I obtained the promise of this for her, and when, at half past ten o'clock, I dragged myself up stairs, jaded and cross enough, I found her there. I saw her through the open door with the light of my dim lamp falling full on her bent figure and white face. She looked up at me, silently, her great dark eyes followed all my motions about the room. It gave me a nameless, uncomfortable feeling that made me turn and look over my shoulder, when I went into the closet, or a dark corner. I began to have serious fears as to the practicability of sleep that night, with nothing but an unbarred door between me and this ghost of a woman. In fact, I may as well acknowledge that I am naturally of a romantic turn of mind, and had anticipated the recital of her adventures in various forms; as, for example, whether she might be a spy, or a Southern aristocrat in disguise, and I believe I even speculated upon the possibility of a chalked negro.

But when I turned again, and saw how wearily she leaned her head upon her hand, how crushed and hopeless was the pressure of her lips, I forgot every thing but my pity. I went up and touched the hand which lay upon the baby's hair, and said: "I am so sorry for you!"

She quivered under my touch, and looked up at me, her lips working beseechingly. Then, I don't know how it was, but she began to talk, and I listened; I forgot that I was tired and sleepy; my romantic fancies dissolved like the dew. I forgot that she was ignorant and poor. I only knew that she suffered, and sat quite still to hear her story.

The woman's name was Mary—Mary Rand. I liked the name for her. Do you remember some one's saying—Tennyson, I think—of Mary the mourner at Bethany, that her "eyes were homes of silent prayer?"<sup>62</sup> I thought of this often. Such a cry went up to God out of her mute look. I thought it must ring through heaven. I never heard from the lips of any preacher such a prayer.

She had lived in the southern part of the State. Her husband had done a small fishing business on one of the inferior rivers, getting but a scanty living for a wife and five little ones, though a more honest one than many of his kind to whom the South closes the avenues of useful labor. I could see the home in a picture while she talked. A house with broken roof and low doorway, half hidden under the great forest trees, which stretched out such giant branches over it, and cradled it so quietly all summer long; the little river that wound among the trees, over which the sunlight slanted and the wind swept like a merry song; the tidy rooms within the house, this stricken mother then so cheery about her work, turning such smiling eyes toward the river which bore her husband's boat, or such reverent eyes up to the sky which showed so blue and still through the vines about the doorway, taking into her heart such happy thoughts of God in the silence of this home He had given her; the children romping in the forest, or grouped about the door with the light on their chubby brown faces and tangled curls, or watching the river turn into molten gold when the sun set, and they waited for the father to come home from work, wading into the water to crowd in his boat for a sail of a few strokes length; then clinging to him up the path, and into the house, where supper stood waiting, and the mother too. An humble meal, and very poor the lowly home, but none the less dear for that. There was sunlight and love enough in it, as there must have always been under the sound of this woman's voice.

The man had been loyal from the first of the war. This, I suspected, was owing to the wife. She had picked up a little learning somewhere—enough to spell out her Bible; it was partly this, but more a certain crude refinement that asserted her superiority. Something there was in this woman's soul which spoke like a voice out of the darkness of all the circumstance

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<sup>62</sup> The line is from Chapter 32 of Alfred, Lord Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (1833-1850).

which hemmed her in, and let you see how pure a soul it was, and what it might have been if God had given it light to grow in.

So, of course, she knew her country at once.

“I wasn’t goin’ to hev Stephen settin up agin the kentry,” she said; “and by’n-by he see it as I did, fur he’s an honest man in his ’pinions is Stephen, an’ he used ter set the children a hoorayin’ fur the flag ter see which on ’em could holler the loudest.”

Of course a harmless, ignorant fisherman, loving his country in the solitude of a forest, could not be left long undiscovered and unpunished in this chivalric Southern land.

“They found him out at last,” she said. “A whole pack on ’em went at him every time he went to town with fish, and they didn’t give him no peace; but he never caved in to ’em—not a mite, an’ the more they worried him the more he sot up fur the Guv’nment; an’ at last it come—what we’d ben livin’ in fear on a long spell. It was one dark night—I remember how the wind was howlin’ like among the trees—an’ we heerd on a sudden a yellin’ like a pack o’ hounds outside the door, an’ it bust open, an’ some officers was there, an’ a gang o’ drunken men behind ’em. I knew to once what it meant.

“‘Stephen,’ says I, ‘they’ve drafted yer.’ He looked so like a tiger they dursn’t touch him. His gun was in the corner, and I see him lookin’ at it, so I knew as well as ef he’d telled me what ter do; but the officers, they’d spied it out, an’ one on ’em he held me so I couldn’t move, an’ t’others pinted their pistils on Stephen an’ tuk him off; he couldn’t help it no way. It made me wild-like. I got away from the man as held me with a great leap, an’ got the gun. They was jest out o’ the door then, but I could ha’ hit ’em. Stephen turned round an’ see me, and says he:

“‘Don’t, fur God’s sake, Mary—they’ll murder both on us!’ An’ then I couldn’t see his face fur the dark, an’ I knew he was gone. I fell down by the gun all in a heap on the floor; the childern was cryin’ an’ kissin’ of me, an’ tuggin’ at my dress, but I never took no notice on ’em. I heerd the men howlin’ outside, but I never moved. All to once there was a great red light out the winder, an’ I heerd wood cracklin’ an’ smelt smoke in the bedroom, an’ I knew they’d fired the house. I ketched up the childern—two in my arms, an’ one on my shoulders, an’ two pullin’ at my skirt—an’ run out o’ the door. It seemed as ef a pack o’ wild beasts was out thar in the burnin’ light. They chased me a ways, till I got to whar the woods was thick an’ dark as pitch; an’ at last I found they was gone, an’ I dropped down in a thicket like as ef I was dead, hidin’ the childern under my dress. They might ha’ murdered us all. There was wus things than that done up the river last week. By’n-by, as nobody come, I durst look round. I heerd the shoutin’ a good ways off, an’ I see a great light on the sky, an’ knew the house was blazin’ up. After a time it went out, an’ the hollerin’ was fainter, goin’ back ter town. Then ’twas still, only the branches creaked, an’ I heerd the wind blowin’ over the river. The woods was dead black, an’ I looked up to the sky, an’ there wasn’t a star to be seen, an’ the great dew dropped down like rain. I huddled the childern up to me to keep ’em warm ef I could, an’ the little things cried ’emsels ter sleep. They was very heavy, an’ cramped my arms till they was stiff, but I didn’t mind; an’ it grew very cold, but I never thought on’t. I only looked up whar the sky was dark, an’ all night long I was prayin’ fur my husband.

“When mornin’ come we hid in the darkest place we could find, an’ staid thar till the sun was jest over our heads. But nobody come after us; so I crawled round an’ found some berries an’ a brook fur the childern ter drink out of, an’ I had two little ginger-cakes in my pocket, an’ we lived on them all day.

“The next day it were jest the same. I never darin’ ter go back, an’ the childern cryin’ fur someat ter eat. When night come I were too faint to move, fur all I found I guv to them. I had

## My Refugees

dropped down on the moss, an' was givin' up ter die thar, when all to once I heerd a noise in the bushes, and I says, 'O God! tuk care on the childern.' 'Yes,' says somebody close by; 'He's sent me ter tuk care on 'em;' and I jumped up with a great scream, fur there was Stephen alive, an' huggin' and kissin' of me an' the children, an' givin' us a loaf o' bread he'd found nigh the old place as he crep' along in the thicket ter get a look at the heap o' ashes that was left. An' he telled us how he'd runned from the fellar as ketched him, an' we'd hide in the woods, an' all go North together, whar none on 'em couldn't touch us.

"An' I jes' put both my arms round his neck, an' I says, 'Stephen, God's guv me you back, an' I doan't ask no more. I guess He'll tuk care on us, an' we'll go.' I used ter read how He loved folks as was in trouble; I used ter believe it—maybe I was wrong, maybe not. I doan't know."

She stopped a moment, some strange, dark glitter creeping into her eyes. After that they changed only to grow more stony; and her voice, as she went on with her story, was cold and hard.

"So we tuk up with the woods for a home, an' 'twere all the home we hed fur three months. We dursn't go anigh the railroads, an' we traveled mostly whar the forest was loneliest, an' the swamps a-plenty. Thar was cold nights too, when the wind cut into us, an' the damp seemed ter choke us like; an' thar was rainy nights, when we crep' under the bushes, and Stephen he allers tuk off his coat ter cover the rest on us, an' thar were no stoppin' of him no way. An' I'd wake up a-cryin' in my dream, an' see his face while he slep' lookin' so white with the cold, an' the childern shiverin' all night; an' I'd lay an' cry an' cry, and the rain cried along with me on the leaves, but it never stopped fur all that. Sometimes we found a shed or a barn whar folks let us sleep, an' sometimes when thar warn't no rebel sojers anigh the place they'd let us in the house.

"But the starvin' come the wust. Folks give us meals sometime, ef we durst go out into the road ter hunt up a house. Then, agin, they cussed us, an' shet the door 'cause we was 'darned Yankees,' yer know. Thar was a few as give us a basketful o' victuals, and it lasted fur a long spell. When we couldn't get nothin', Stephen, he shot rabbits an' birds, an' we picked berries, an' ketched fish; fur he wouldn't never steal, that man wouldn't, ef he was ter die fur it. But there was days when we hadn't nothin', an' the childern cried an' teased fur food, an' I only jes' sot an' looked at 'em, an' hadn't nothin' ter give 'em, only ter hold 'em in my arms, an' tell 'em ter fold their little hands an' say, 'Our Father.' The poor innocents stopped cryin' allers, 'cause they thought He'd throw 'em down bread from heaven. In course He did give us some'at mostly, or we'd all a ben under the grass; but He didn't send enough ter keep the childern. Four on 'em is dead. He didn't leave one big enough ter call me mother, or kiss me with its little comfortin' ways; there's nobody left but the baby. I doan't know why she stood it, when the rest couldn't. P'r'aps because I kep' it under my shawl mostly, an' it were the warmest of all on us.

"Jack went fust—that was his father's boy. He tuk fever in them marshes, an' kinder wasted afore we knew it. I went out ter hunt up some supper one night, an' left the boy with Stephen. After I'd ben a little ways I come back ter say good-by—I didn't know what fur, only I couldn't help it. He was lyin' in his father's arms, an' he says: 'When you come back with some supper sing me ter sleep, mother.' So I says, 'Yes, Jackey,' an' I leaned over ter kiss him. 'Goodby, mother,' says he, an' he put up his little white lips. An' all th way I heerd it—'Goodby, mother.' It were like as ef the trees kep' tellin' it, an' the birds singin' it in their nests, an' the great blow o' wind that had come up, cryin' it over an' over. I put my hands up to my ears not ter hear it, an' I runned out o' the woods ter get away from it; for we must hev some

supper, an' it were safer fur me ter go than Stephen—folks didn't notice a woman so much. I found a bit of a house anigh the woods as give me some bread an' a pail o' milk—they was Union folks; an' I was happy-like, fur Jackey would like the milk, yer know. All the way back I was thinkin' as how his eyes would laugh at the sight on't—pretty eyes they was, Miss, like his father's, blue an' bright like. Thar was a great white moon come up afore I got thar; an' I see how the light was down in the holler whar I'd left him like a sheet dropped on the bushes. Pretty soon I see 'em all—the childern standin' round all in a heap, an' Stephen settin' on the ground with his face in his hat. My heart kinder stood still all to once, but I walked along. Stephen he see me, an' got up, an' come up ter me. He didn't say nothin'; but only jes' tuk my hands an' led me to whar somthin' lay black an' still under a tree. An' I looked down an' I called out 'Jackey! Jackey!' but he didn't make no answer, an' I touched his little face, an' all to once I knew he was dead. I threw down the milk an' bread I'd brought so fur for him, an' I tuk his poor head in my lap, an' held tight hold uv his little cold hands. I hadn't ben thar, yer see, an' it come hard ter hev him die without his mother. I promised ter sing him ter sleep, an' now I were too late—he couldn't hear me. The moon was very white, and I heerd the childern sobbin' an' Stephen were callin' uv me an' kissin' uv me, but I couldn't answer him nohow, an' I couldn't cry. I doan't know much how the night went. I sat an' watched the little shaders from the leaves comin' an' goin' on the boy's forehead, an' thought how they kissed it like, an' how he wouldn't never feel me kissin' him agin. He were sech a pretty boy, yer know, an' I never were thar to see him die, an' I never sung that little song.

“Twarn't only a week along from this when Stephen he got took. He went fur victuals an' didn't come home. We waited fur him all day an' he didn't come, an' we slep' all night alone under the trees waitin' fur him. But when mornin' come an' no Stephen, I knew ter once what it meant, and I war right. Somebody as knew him tracked him an' ketched him in a yard whar he was beggin' our breakfast. The folks was rebels an' guv him up easy. They tuk him along—two officers thar was—an' got a good piece with him; but they hadn't no han'cuffs an' was weakly plantation gentlemen. So he broke away. He knocked one on 'em down an' tuk his gun an' runned. T'other fellar he fired an' hit Stephen in the neck; but Stephen is a firs'-rate shot an' the fellar dropped down. I doan't know whether he war hurt bad, but he never chased him any. Stephen crawled back pretty nigh us, an' 'twas the second day I heerd him groanin' in the bushes. He was lyin' thar all covered with blood when I come up. We got him down in a big swamp, an' thar we hid fur a long spell. We hed mostly warm nights while he were sick, an' no rain ter speak on; but the damp was like pison fur us all to be a breathin' on. I nussed him all I could, 'twarn't much in sech a place, an' I used ter crawl out every night ter find food fur to-morrer.

“Twarn't fur as we'd gone after he'd got so's to be movin' afore the twins took sick. They didn't stan' it long, an' it were better fur 'em, poor things! When I see 'em both pinin' ter once, their little hands so poor an' white, an' heerd 'em moanin' in my arms, I were slow believin' of it. I thought it were enough to be lonely fur Jackey all the nights an' days—to be missin' of him every year, an' be cryin' fur the pretty boy he'd ha' growed ter be. I never thought I'd lose no more—I never *thought* on't. It come ter me one night when the childern hed ben sinkin' nigh most the afternoon. We hed stopped with 'em by a little brook whar the bushes was thick an' warm. On a sudden Stephen he called out, 'Mary,' says he, 'they're goin' ter see Jackey.' I looked up into his eyes an' I says, 'Stephen, it'll kill me.' He put his hands up ter his face an' I heerd him choke like. 'Mary,' says he, 'I can't comfort yer.' I never see him so afore. Thar hadn't never ben a time when he didn't cheer me up an' kiss me ef any thin' vexed me—I

## My Refugees

hadn't never borne the least uv a trouble alon' sence we war married. So I knew how it cut inter his heart to hev the childern took, an' how selfish it was in me ter forget he loved 'em jes' the same as I did. I shet my lips then an' never said another word.

"So we sat down ter see 'em die. The sun was settin' like a great red ball over the thicket. I remember how I looked round an' see a sparrow as crep' into her nest under the grass. The little ones was chirpin' at her, an' she was answerin' of 'em. I couldn't bear ter hear 'em no way. I thought how God was makin' a little wuthless bird happy, an' hed forgot me, an' was takin' all my little ones away. I wouldn't never hev 'em in my nest ter sing tu like she. I see every thing about me that night. I remember a great white rock an' sand-bank over in the field standin' out agin' the sun, an' how I thought the brook looked like blood, fur the light were so red on't. I see 'em all—I see 'em over an' over, an' yet I doan't think I tuk my eyes off the childern.

"Stephen tuk Katie, an' I held the boy, an' we sot tergether by the brook an' see the night comin'. We never said nothin' to each other, it wouldn't do no good. Ef I'd spoke once I should ha' cried out, so I should ha' worried the little dying things. I heerd Stephen prayin' to himself over Katie—a sort uv whisperin' prayer, as ef he didn't hardly know he was sayin' uv it; but I didn't say none. I never spoke ter God all night—I ders'ent; I might ha' cursed Him.

"Dick went fust. Katie she held out till nigh mornin', but I jes' sot with the boy stone-cold on my knee, an' never telled Stephen. I see him bendin' over the little thing in his arms, his face lookin' so white, even in the dark, an' I heerd him prayin', 'O God! leave one on 'em—leave one 'em—doan't take 'em both!' I couldn't ha' telled him no way. Katie wore past speakin' then; but I could jes' see her little face from whar I sat. Dick's hands was close in mine—I hadn't never let go sence they growed cold. I see after a while a bit of light shinin' in the brook, an' I knew the stars was out. But I never looked up at the sky. He was thar as had taken away my childern. He was so fur up. I thought He never cared. Ef He'd forgot me 'twarn't no use fur me ter be lookin' at His sky an' sayin' over His prayers. So I sat an' see the shinin' in the brook an' the two little white faces. I heerd Mattie hushin' the baby ter sleep whar I'd left her under the bushes. The little thing crep' up once an' put her warm fingers on my face an' kissed me.

"I heerd Katie moanin', an' I see Stephen holdin' uv her all night. When the fust mornin' light come in through the trees we turned an' looked at one another, an' they was both dead. We made 'em two little graves by the brook an' buried 'em thar. Then we tuk hold uv hands an' kneeled down on the moss, an' Stephen he prayed sech a prayer as I never heerd afore. It made me look up ter the sky fur the fust time an' see how blue it was, an' how bright the trees was in the sun, an' think how they'd be blue an' bright over the little cold things, jes' the same when we was gone, an' how we'd leave 'em all alone so fur behind us. Then I cried—oh, how I did cry! I hadn't cried afore fur weeks—I got so frozen like—an' I hain't dropped a tear sence.

"So we got up an' stepped over the brook, lookin' back ter say 'good-by' to the little graves, an' went on with Mattie an' the baby. We come ter safer travelin' soon, an' found a house by the road as tuk us in an' hid us up garret fur a spell. They was good to us, God bless 'em! an' guv us enought to eat; but all the nussin' an' warm fires was too late fur Mattie. They made a bed fur her up in the loft, an' when the poor little white thing put her arms around me and cried ter go to to sleep, 'cause she was so cold an' tired, I knew to once what it meant. 'Twarn't only one sort o' sleep as would do her good, so I telled she might, tryin' ter smile an' say as how God would guv her a nice nap. I see her shet her eyes, an' I crossed her little hands, an' I telled God thar warn't nothin' left but Stephen an' the baby, an' ef He was goin' ter tuk 'em He'd

better do it now while they had a roof to die under. But Stephen p'inted ter the little dead thing on the bed, an' asked me ef I'd get to whar she was, sayin' sech things ter Him as had tuk her away from sorrer an' sufferin', an' made her a little angel to hum with him forever. So he put the baby in my arms an' made me say a prayer over after him—he were allers the best on us both, Stephen were. It was I as learned him ter read the Bible, but I didn't never remember it like he. He tuk it all to once inter his heart, an' did what it telled him fur himself an' me too. I keep a doubtin' an' a doubtin', but Stephen he takes it all, Miss, jes' like a little child. Well, then we cut off some uv Mattie's yeller curls, an' he laid 'em in my Bible, so when I wanted ter kiss 'em I had ter kiss it too, yer see, and read the promise which telled me as how I'd never be forsook.

“After that we found we was suspected of bein' thar, an' the folks couldn't keep us no longer; so we was off agin—us three alone. Then we come across some Union sojers as tuk us up here in the cars, an' a chaplain as paid our fare, an' so we come here this mornin', Miss. Stephen he's clean beat out; but ef God hain't forgot all about us, an' he gets well an' strong, we'll go ter work an' get an honest home. I doan't know as I can ever call it home, an' all them little things as was playin' round the old place by the river lyin' cold an' stiff in the swamps.”

Just then her baby wakened and began to laugh and coo at her in its pretty way, putting up its tiny hands to play about her face. There was something so warm and tender and full of life in the touch; I saw the chill melt out of her eyes; I saw her lips quiver. I am not ashamed to tell you what I did. I just went up to her, put both my arms around her neck, and her head on my shoulder, and began to cry. After a while I found that she was crying too. I knew that was a mercy to her; so I laid her down on the bed, and knelt down and said over some little short prayer, to which she seemed to listen. Then I put her baby in her arms, thinking it could comfort her best, shut the door softly, and went out.

Stephen Rand grew very sick. Dr. Joyce began to come away from his bedside looking quite grave. Whatever the wife saw in his face she did not comprehend, or else for some reason her own did not reflect it. Every day, early and late, morning and night, she was beside him, silent as a shadow, her patient face never turned from his.

The men began to watch for her as she came in each morning. Sometimes they would pass her baby round from cot to cot for a plaything, or they would send some cheery message to her in their hearty, soldier fashion, seeming pleased at her grateful smile. But as the days went on, and they saw how the fever was burning in her husband's eye and cheek, and caught snatches of the consultations the Doctor and I had over him out in the entry, I noticed how often they hushed their noisy jokes and laughter when they looked over to the man's corner, and how many anxious inquiries for our refugees met me every morning.

It puzzled me at first to see how entirely Nature seemed to have confused her rules in the hearts of these two. The man clinging to her, resting so in her strength and love, yet fancying still in his delirium that he was again her protector in the dangers of their forest life; taking with such a childlike trust the truths from the Bible she had taught him to understand, giving them back to her with a faith as pure as a woman's; yet withal a brave man, no coward in principle, no craven in danger.

And for the wife, her face, as I had first seen it, told what she was. What we mean by the innate religion of a woman was with her dimmed or missing. There are natures which *must* feel every wave, and tide, and current that pulses about them—which must try the *lowest* deep before they can anchor. Once bedded, the waters from very depth are still: the sea, however stormy, can not shake that which is sure and steadfast. Far beyond them, in shallow waves, some little craft

## My Refugees

will have anchored in the sunlight, and we who watch that other tossing in the surge, and hear the cry which calls from deep unto deep, perhaps turn away un pitying. For, we say, there seems a fairer haven, and they would not enter it.

With just enough intellect to stagger her faith, not enough to root it, the intensity of the life this woman had led had not yet worked out its own fulfillment. Looking a few steps onward to what was before her I trembled for her. What chance was God giving her? Would He not bring the soothing of a little rest into her weary days?

I used to wonder as I looked up often at her from my work, and saw how quietly she sat, “the same loved, tireless watcher,” how her husband’s eyes followed hers, and his voice called her, how they clung to one another—these two from whom God had taken all else but the knowledge of what they were each to each—I used to wonder how she could bear it to have him go.

Out of those busy days I have saved many pleasant pictures of her as she sat fanning the hot air about the bed, watching for all little cares for her husband, hushing her baby, or perhaps bowing her head, her lips moving as if in prayer. And I thought what it would be when for such tender offices no voice would call to her.

Once, I remember, I was busy over the Captain not far from her, and I saw her turn suddenly in answer to her husband’s call.

“Mary, whar’s the baby?”

“Here, Stephen.”

She held up the little thing so that he could see it, her eyes on him, and not on the child. He put up his thin hand and touched its face.

“It’s all we’ve got left, Mary, ain’t it?”

“Hush, Stephen man! Yer too sick ter think on’t now.”

“No. I allers think when I’m awake the rest is better off. I like ter think who’s tuk ’em.”

“I doan’t,” in a quick, sharp tone.

“Mary! Mary! yer must. Yer might tempt Him ter do wus things.”

She made no answer, but I could see her thin lips compress suddenly, and I marked how the purple veins were swelling on her forehead.

Her husband passed his hand over the baby’s puny face, and then looked up at her.

“Mary, ef I should be took—”

She stopped him in a low, sharp cry, and caught both his hands in hers.

“Stephen, yer won’t,” she said.

A bit of sunlight had fallen across the bed and touched the three, dropping off from her dark hair and her deep-set, glowing eyes, down on the sunken face upon the pillow, and then on the little child, who saw it with a bubbling laugh, and put up its hands to catch the golden motes that floated past.

She caught at it quickly, as if it were a promise.

“Yer’ve ben dreamin’, Stephen,” she said, with a nervous laugh. “The sun’s come ter wake yer. Why, man, yer most well. I haven’t seen yer luk so natural-like sence you was sick.”

She bent over with a long look into her husband’s eyes, and pressed her lips to his. She did not notice that a cloud had dimmed the warm light which was there but a moment before, and that the face which it had for the instant touched with a glow of health was pallid again in the gray of the dull afternoon.

That was some strange contradiction in her nature—this woman with the desolate eyes and frozen voice—which, while it accepted all life as without hope, for the graves which had



closed above it, yet was so blind to the fact that she stood on the brink of another. Clinging so tenaciously to the one love yet left to her—feeling so sure that God *could* not take away her husband—who could wake her from her dream? Not I, surely. I watched her as the slow days passed—the morning sun, the twilight, the night that fell with such heavy shadows on the hospital floor—finding her alike with that steady look in her eyes and that firm hand which betokened as yet no shade of fear or doubt.

Sometimes I thought a glimpse of what was coming darkened before her for a moment. There was one day when her husband had been in wild delirium all night, and the morning had found him in a state of half stupor. She had stood long beside him, watching his almost lifeless face in silence. I came up, at last, and begged her to go down into the yard with me for a few moments for a breath of fresh air.

She turned with the quick movement of one in wonder at my question.

“I can’t.”

“But you will be sick yourself if you breathe nothing but this hospital air. The Doctor will look after your husband; and Tim, you know, calls me if I am needed.”

“I can’t.”

“But if he is worse, and you can not then do any thing for him—”

She caught up her baby, stooped and kissed her husband’s forehead, then followed me without a word. I led her out into the sunlight, and having some little nicety to cook for one of my boys I left her, and went into the kitchen. I could see her through the windows, pacing back and forth under the two or three stunted trees that grew by the fence, her eyes on the ground, the bit of blue sky above her head, and the fresh morning all about her. All about her—not shrinking from her dark, uncheerful figure and bloodless face, but touching them softly like a blessing. Back and forth—to and fro—I thought how soon she would walk back and forth, and to and fro alone in a desert world.

In a few moments I went out to get the other half of my breath of air. It was a little yard, but filled just then with drying clothes, drying pans, Irish maids, and maids of color.

A pretty mulatto girl stood coquetting with her lover over the fence. A swarm of little children were playing in the street—black and white alike; indeed, one was hardly distinguishable from the other, for they were all massed in the ditch, deep in the mysteries of “mud-pies.” I noticed, in fact, that Young Africa had decidedly the advantage as regarded skill in their culinary operations; and as for strength of lung and fist, my little white brethren came off second best. For which I pitied the young gentlemen, and began mentally to reconsider the question whether I was an abolitionist. They did not form an unpleasant picture, however, with the light on their merry faces and gay dress; and the sound of their happy laughter rang like a bell on the morning air. Close beside me, too, on the steps, a little coal-black baby, belonging to one of our wash-women, lay cooing in the sun, making sundry demonstrations with its hands and feet, as if it fought with a whole race of imaginary slaveholders. I saw Mary Rand stoop to kiss it as she walked, looking at its chubby face and then at the puny little one she held nestled under her shawl. She stopped, too, with a long look at the group of children in the street, her eyes shaded with her hand so I could not see them. Then turning, as she resumed her walk, to watch the happy lovers at the fence. Yet she looked upon them all with the apathy with which we recall some bright dream. It *was* but a dream; we wake and it is gone. Seeking for it, we find only the silence of the night. So we sleep no longer, but wait for daybreak. Well for us if it comes. But

## My Refugees

if He who said “Let there be light!” revokes His decree and the darkness lingers—then, also, it is well.<sup>63</sup>

Presently the noon hour struck, and the father of the pugilistic baby on the steps came home from work, stopping a moment to come in and take up the little thing. The mother came out to meet him.

“Hi, Dan! it am an awfu’ heat for ye to work, dis yere!”

“Hot enuff,” replied Dan; “ye look beat out, little woman.”

He stooped, with one arm still around the baby, and put the other about her neck to kiss her. The woman returned the kiss boisterously, but none the less lovingly for that, and looked up into his face with a hearty, happy laugh. Then they walked away, and down the street together. It was a little thing; but do you not know that the smallest knives are keenest? I turned toward the quiet figure which had been pacing back and forth. It was quiet no longer. She looked up at me quickly, her whole face quivering. Then she wrung her hands tightly across her forehead, hurried past me, and into the house.

We had some busy days after this. There were two deaths and a fresh relay of wounded, among whom were a number of rebel prisoners—whom I sent, by-the-way, to Mrs. Cruppins. I acquit myself of all unholy self-indulgence in this arrangement. I felt that I was serving my country in sending her enemies to the most uncomfortable place I had at command.

After the first gloom caused by the two empty beds and the sight of fresh suffering had passed away, the boys rallied from it into such a programme of jokes and laughter as quite filled the day. I began to think they had forgotten their sympathy with our refugees, and was musing upon the fickleness of human nature while I sat one morning in a meditative attitude before the kitchen fire, my sleeves rolled up, my eyes fixed reflectively upon a basin of arrow-root, and blessed with the consciousness that my face was slowly but surely turning to “celestial rosy red” over the coals. While thus occupied I neglected the warning of a familiar whistle, and was paid for it by hearing a suppressed snicker behind the door, and feeling the gaze of two very small gray eyes fastened upon me through the crack.

“Cool weather, ain’t it?”

The remark was supposed to be addressed to some invisible infant whom I could hear crawling opportunely about in the same mysterious corner. The infant assented by a scream which set every one of my nerves on edge.

“Maybe we’d like our picter took,” rejoined the Invisible.

Again the infant assented as before. The assent was followed by the same results. I buckled on my armor at this. I took off my arrow-root with a jerk, called indiscriminately on the various maids of the tub and ironing-board about me to go to the rescue of the musical child, repressed a strong desire to throw my steaming gruel at the eyes behind the crack, and marched up to the offender.

“Tim,” I said, sternly, “is this you?”

“That’s allers ben my ’pinion, Miss.”

“What do you wish?”

“Dr. Joyce sent fur you, post haste.”

My desire concerning the arrow-root this time got so far under way of fulfillment that I saved it and my dignity only by a sudden pull, and the lucky Tim escaped with a few drops on his hand. Enough, however, was perhaps as good as a feast, for he grew suddenly dumb, and

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<sup>63</sup>Genesis 1:3.

followed me meekly up the stairs, eying the while his reddened finger with a thoughtful aspect which gave me the greatest satisfaction.

The Doctor met me with a grave face.

“Well?” I said, stopping short.

“Stephen Rand—he can’t last through the night, unless there is some change I see no reason to expect.”

“Who’ll tell her?”

“You must.”

“Dr. Joyce,” said I, “I’m no coward, and I never disobey orders; but I wish you’d find me a few moments to go away and cry first.”

“Why—why, really,” said this good man, whom I puzzled every day by my feminine developments, “I don’t see how you can be spared just now. There’s the man who came last night waiting for a fresh bandage; and Jones, and—I don’t see how there’s time just at present.”

Of course there wasn’t. I knew that very well. I must face duty if it put me in the front and held me under the guns.

I found the boys quite sober as I passed along finishing all most pressing work, and prolonging it, I am afraid, rather more than was necessary; for which I expect you will combat my assertion that I was not a coward.

“So he’s going at last!” the Captain said, with a sorrowful glance into the corner. “I—I call that hard, poor thing!”

The sergeant called softly as I went by,

“Have you told her? If it was my wife—if I was you, I’d rather be under fire than have it to do!”

“I say, mum”—and Pat, the warm-hearted, was tugging at my sleeve with his one arm—“I say, how long’ll he hold out?”

“Till night.”

“May the Houly Vargin an’ all the Saints have marcy on her!” he ejaculated, fervently. “She’s sech a poor young critter, shure!”

But the thing that most unmanned me, more than all the anxious questions that met me from each bed as I passed along—the messages from Jones and Brown, or the condescending sympathy of the rebel—was the entreaty of my little drummer-boy, who had lain in agony with his wound for many weeks, and was himself marked with the touch of that unerring finger that no human care or love can parry: an orphan child, to whom now I alone was a mother, and so it was that even to look at him as he turned his patient face so mutely on the pillow brought the quick tears. Putting up his hand into mine he said, softly,

“Is the Chaplain here?”

The Chaplain was sick that morning, and so I told him.

“Who’ll pray for that man?”

“My boy, he isn’t afraid to die; he needs no chaplain.”

“But his wife; she has such a white, white face!”

I was silent. I could not tell him how she needed prayer—purer, better prayers than mine could be.

“I remember how mother felt when father died,” he said, and spoke no more then, but turned his face quietly away. I saw that he folded his hands, and I heard the echo of a whisper on his lips.

I went up at last to Mary Rand and touched her shoulder.

## My Refugees

“I want to see you a moment,” I said.

She turned with a look of surprise, stooped a moment to touch her husband’s forehead with her hand, then rose and followed me.

We sat down under a large entry window, quietly. I remember how the garish sunlight played about her worn face, and how the wind blew in gusts up the stairs and through the deserted passage.

“I have something to tell you,” I began.

But there I stopped, held fast by the look in her eyes. Dark, yet filled with the depths of some glowing light; transfixed like one who asks the question on which hangs an eternity. I caught her hand quickly and held it in both of mine. I could not speak. She understood the answer.

“I know”—speaking slowly in a voice that froze me—“I know what yer’ve come ter say. How long’ll they give him?”

“The Doctor says the crisis must come to-night.”

“To-night.” She repeated the word slowly, like one whose memory is becoming treacherous. “To-night. Ef there’s a God in heaven I hope He’ll remember He’s takin’ all I’ve got left—all I’ve got left.”

Her hand lay like ice in mine. She did not hear my words; she did not feel my touch which tried to detain her. She rose and walked slowly back, with uncertain step, as if she walked in the dark.

I found her when I came back in her old seat, in the same attitude of quiet watching, with the same unfaltering look, a shade paler, the lines about her mouth sharper, but her voice, when she spoke to her husband, clear and low in its love; and there was no cry or sobbing that might disturb his last few hours. That was in the morning. Once she left him, to go to the kitchen and feed her baby, but that was all. The broad noon-light struck at last in flakes of gold upon the floor. I brought up a little dinner, and tried gently to make her eat. She only shook her head, pushing it away. Through all the hot afternoon she did not seem to move her eyes from her husband’s face. He was tossing on the bed in frenzy, calling for her, catching at her hand, but still he did not recognize her.

Her baby slept quietly on her arm. She did not seem to know it, holding it mechanically. Toward evening it wakened and cried. She paid no heed to it. I went up and took the child gently from her. Her arm remained in the same position as before. I could hear her quick, sharp breathing; but she did not look at me nor speak. I took the little thing away and found a negro girl to care for it, wondering as I went, and felt the clinging hands about my neck, whether its warm touch could ever comfort her, and if God would not in mercy take them both.

The evening came at last. The boys were very quiet, and we sat watching through the windows the gorgeous hues of purple and gold that were in the sky. The great warm sun dropped at length behind the hills. The twilight began to creep in at the windows and fall heavily on the hospital floor. It wrapped her figure where she sat, one white, thin hand fanning her husband, the other lying clenched in her lap, her head bent toward the bed to listen to his ravings. Once, when he had called her name many times, I saw her drop the fan quickly and, creeping up, lay her head upon his arm with a long wail.

“Oh, Stephen, it’s me! it’s yer wife, Stephen! I hain’t never left yer. Ef yer’d only kiss me once!”

Perhaps he understood her, for he put up the hand he held to his hot lips. She put her arm about his neck and kissed him once—twice—almost fiercely. Then she buried her face in the

clothes. I could just hear her stifled cry, “Oh, my God! my God! my God!” three times—a cry that made me tremble. The evening wore away. Stephen Rand lay panting and weaker now as the night came on.

I sat watching the forms about his bed and the flickering of the newly-lighted lamps above the faces of my boys. Now and then some one called me, and I went silently to meet their wants. Often I could hear a groan from some sufferer, or the Captain’s cough, but nearer and more distinctly Stephen Rand’s labored breathing, and his wife’s low voice soothing his delirium. Once the little drummer called faintly for some water. I went up to give it to him. He smiled as I left him, looking over to the corner.

“I haven’t forgotten her,” he said. So he turned away, and once more folded his hands.

I came back and sat down again. I could do nothing for him. His wife jealously watched for every care which now remained. I watched her face, wondering who would dare to comfort her when the morning came.

Presently her husband grew more quiet, and fell at last into an uneasy slumber, fitful and restless at first, but gradually he became quite still. The Doctor, with his finger on the pulse, looked, I thought, surprised.

Was it stupor, or rest? was it death, or life? The woman’s eyes asked him mutely, but he could not tell her.

The light fell full upon her where she was crouched on the floor by the bed, her hands in her husband’s. Her thin hair had fallen down about her neck; her face, with its drawn lips and hueless cheeks, looked more like death than the one on which she gazed. A soft, natural heat seemed to color that at last, and he stirred in his sleep. The Doctor passed his hand over the man’s forehead, and I was sure his face brightened.

“Speak to him,” he said to the wife.

She bent over, with her hair falling about her face so I could not see it.

“Stephen!”

He opened his eyes, and smiled faintly.

“Whar are ye, Mary?”

“Here, Stephen! I’ve tuk yer hand.”

“Yes. I thought I’d got ter go away, Mary. God’s guv me back ter ye!”

He was quite himself now—weak as an infant, his voice scarcely above a whisper, but natural in its tone; and the hand which his wife held had grown soft and moist.

She clasped it tightly, holding it up against her breast, and dropped her face upon the pillow by his, her hair falling over them both. Her whole slight frame was quivering. No one could see her face. Through the moments that passed before she spoke her husband touched her hair caressingly, and smiled. At last it came—a little, low cry, like a penitent child.

“Oh, Stephen! He’s guv yer back, an’ I won’t never say hard things on Him agin! I thought—I thought, oh, my husband! I thought He’d tuk yer, an’ left me all alone!”

I heard the sergeant’s sobs from the other end of the room; the boys who had sat up in bed, holding their breath to listen, lay down again and turned their faces to the wall; the Doctor choked; and as for me I ran out of the room, locked myself in up stairs, and cried like a baby for fifteen minutes.

When I went to the drummer-boy a while after and touched his forehead I started at the chill. His hands were still folded as when he sought from the orphan’s God a blessing for this humbled, grateful woman; and even while he asked he stood face to face. She was a stranger, but he took her in—in to his pure child’s heart!

## My Refugees

Who can tell what agencies that prayer set at work? Who knows what she owed to the boy lying so still and with such a smile before her.

## MARGARET BRONSON

I know you are tired enough of tales of war, and that your own dark memories of the sealed record of the nation's bloody baptism need no fresh reminders. My story does not concern a battle, but a woman; and how can I help it if she lived down there on the border, so surrounded and hemmed in by conflict and combatants, by scenes of peril and blood and death, that they must necessarily interweave themselves with the controlling events of her life? I hardly know what you would have thought of her if you had seen her standing there alone on the lawn in the haze of that sultry June evening. You would have stopped involuntarily, as before some striking picture. A woman with a certain regal bearing in the drooping of her shoulders, in the position of her hands, in the curve of her neck, in the very folds of her lustreless black silk dress and mantle of white crape that fell over it—a graceful woman certainly; a well-poised head held a little loftily, perhaps; a face somewhat pale contrasted with the hair that was pushed back from it, and features regular as a statue's.—A beautiful woman then? That would depend partly on yourself, partly on her mood. A particular curl in the bright color of her lips, an arch of her eyebrow, a sharp, decided tone about the whole contour of her face, might at any time and always have repelled you. Or, if you had seen her smile as she could smile if she chose, as she did not often, you might wish Murillo could have painted her.<sup>64</sup> The slant sunbeams were flecking the grass and the trees above her, touching spots of gold, too, upon her dark dress. You would have noticed rather her independence of their effect than that they added any thing by it; the play of light and shade and color did not seem necessary to her as to many women. You would fancy that she might stand in the dimness of a dungeon unchanged. In this circumstance—as often through lesser avenues the soul finds voice—lay the key to Miss Bronson's nature.

People were rather dubious on the subject of a young woman who carried pistols, had no desire to marry, and was not afraid of guerrillas. It was outré, it evinced discontent with her sphere; it was—it really was—"strong-minded." Very likely. And you don't like the word? I am sorry, for it seems to be appropriate, and I am obliged to use it. It and she fitted well into the life she had led. For a mother, she had only the memory of a kiss on a dead face; for childhood and girlhood, a long, luxurious dream with her own fancies, and the sole companionship of that uncompanionable, silent father, who, dying six months ago, left her as inheritance enough of his own Northern temperament to cool the heats of her Southern blood; a well-ordered plantation, and a crowd of model slaves moulded after the most sacred pattern of the "institution"—perhaps because their master was too much of a gentleman to be grossly cruel—perhaps because he found occasion to pacify within himself certain clamorous memories of the faith of his fathers.

As to the slaves, Miss Bronson freed them within a month after the old man gave her his last kiss; she would have done it the day after his funeral, except out of respect for him. This utterly illogical and inconsequent act was doubtless the foundation of the objectionable epithet aforesaid, which horrified rumor had attached to her. As for the plantation, she carried its business on by herself, with such of the negroes who chose to remain with her as she could support; smiled when the neighbours were scandalized that Miss Bronson should reduce herself to such disgraceful poverty; chose neither relative, friend, nor husband for company, but passed her days in solitude and the gloom of the old rooms which had such a foreign hush in them, from

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<sup>64</sup>Murillo: Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1618-1682) was a Spanish painter famous for his paintings of the Virgin Mary.

missing the dead man's silence. She might have been lonely, for she loved him; or she might not. No one knew but herself.

The haze had blotted out the golden flecks on her dress and hair, and the twilight had fallen heavily, while she stood there watching the west. She began at last to pace back and forth under the trees, in a peculiar, nervous way she had, which was more like that of a man than of a woman, yet not unwomanly nor ungraceful.

A footstep in the street, and a voice at the gate calling her name, aroused her from her reverie. She turned her head slowly, and stopped her walk.

"Mr. M'Ginley, I think? It is rather dark."

"Yes, Miss Bronson."

She did not advance to meet him or invite him to enter, but stood as she had stood, watching the sunset, in that statue-like attitude which could not be any thing but haughty, if she tried to make it so. Yet I doubt if she knew it. The young man hesitated an instant, then came in, and up the graveled walk.

"Am I intruding?"

"Intruding? Oh no."

"I should be sorry if I were, because—"

"Are you alone?"

It was not Miss Bronson's custom to interrupt; she was too well-bred; he knew that.

"Yes," he said.

"It is not safe, I suppose?" she questioned, busied with drawing the crape over her shoulders.

"Perhaps not; that is a matter of very little consequence, however."

The shade of bitterness in his tone could not have escaped her, but she took no notice of it; she occupied herself in picking a blossom of the scarlet trumpet-flower that trailed over the trees; then threw it away.

"Won't you sit down? You may be tired with your walk."

He thanked her, and refused with some reserve, placing the garden-chair for her. She preferred to stand.

"You do not wear the gray, I see, when you take your strolls," she said, glancing at the eagles on his sleeve.<sup>65</sup> They had been bright once, but were dull with long service now.

"Hardly—not even in *this* hospitable town. I prefer, under all circumstances, to carry the face as well as the heart of loyalty. If I recollect rightly, I believe I have never been afraid or ashamed of this uniform."

The rough private's dress formed a strong contrast to the elegance of hers; but it was more than balanced by something in his deep-set eyes, and a certain pressure of his thin lips; perhaps a word of Mrs. Browning's—*masterful*—would have expressed it.<sup>66</sup> Some such thought

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<sup>65</sup>"You do not wear the gray": may refer to the practice, during the early years of the war, of Union officers wearing dress uniforms with gray jackets, discontinued after 1862 because they were too often fired upon by their own troops, or, more likely to Union soldiers wearing a Confederate uniform as a means of disguising themselves so they could move somewhat freely in the south.

<sup>66</sup>Mrs. Browning is English poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-861), who was extremely popular through the period and a huge influence on Phelps. Barrett Browning



as this may have crossed her mind, for she glanced from the uniform up into his weather-stained face. Then she looked away. She may have remembered just then the home he had left, the friends he had estranged, the hardships and perils he had borne and braved, for this humble place among his country’s workers. Miss Bronson had many theories of her own concerning sham patriotism, but she knew the ring of the real coin when she heard it. It was another evidence of the justice of that unfashionable epithet I have alluded to that she had been loyal from the fall of Sumter, and that she had had the courage to say so when occasion offered.<sup>67</sup>

“On the contrary”—with some brightness in her eyes—“you should be proud of it.”

She was kind to think so, he said, and said it wondering if there were a servant on her plantation to whom she might not have spoken the same words as graciously.

“It has seen rough work in its day, Miss Bronson, but we are rather still in camp just now. Are you not *very* lonely some of these summer evenings?”

The abruptness of the question, asked with the look and tone with which he asked it, would have embarrassed many women. To Miss Bronson, question, tone, and look alike seemed to be no more than any other idle chat. Except for the chill in her voice, when she said, raising her eyelids in her slow, haughty way:

“Lonely? Why should I be?”

M’Ginley bit his lip.

“Are not my grounds looking well, Mr. M’Ginley?” turning, with a polite, careless smile, which on her face was a mere glitter. “The guerrillas have let me alone so far, except that little patch of cotton down in the south field, which was of small consequence.”

“I wish they had not touched the south field, Miss Bronson.”

“Why that particularly? it could easily be spared.”

“Because I have pleasant associations with it.”

*She* remembered too—he knew she did—the days when they had played there as children, at mimic house-keeping on the mimic plantation—the long, long sunny days bright with pictures of blossoms and birds and cloudless skies, and the little dark-eyed girl who used to go out among them with him, hand in hand. She *must* remember. Yet if she did she gave no sign. The incredulous arch of her eyebrow, which was her only answer, seemed to sting the young man. He turned quickly, some sudden flush mounting to his forehead, stopped in his slow walk down the path and faced her.

“Miss Bronson, look at me, if you please.”

She complied, because she chose to; she made it very evident that was her only reason. His face just then had a look Miss Bronson was little used to meeting, much less to enduring quietly.

“You *do* remember.”

She smiled.

“Playing with you in the south field? Oh, yes; I have a good memory.”

“You do *not* remember it unpleasantly?”

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frequently uses the word “masterful,” most notably to describe Romney Leigh in her long poem *Aurora Leigh* (1856).

<sup>67</sup>The Civil War began on 12 April 1861 when Southern forces opened fire on Fort Sumter, South Carolina.

“Mr. M‘Ginley, it is somewhat chilly standing still so long.” He turned sharply away from her and strode down to the gate. She continued her walk as indifferently as if nothing had happened to interrupt her.

“Are you going? Well, I wish you a pleasant evening and a safe walk.”

He smiled bitterly.

“A man’s life is the most worthless investment he has, in these times. If the little dividends should stop before I see you again—”

He waited, apparently for some expression of interest from her. But there was not a word or a look. She stood perfectly still, with her eyes on the darkening road.

“In that case I thought I should like to tell you why I left camp to-night. Do you wish to know?”

“Oh, I’ll leave that to you; if you choose to tell me, you may.”

Again that look which Miss Bronson was not used to enduring. His eyes were on fire; the compression of his lips seemed absolute pain—perhaps she did not see it.

“I *do* choose to tell you. I came to see you; if I had seen you for a moment unknown to yourself, my object would have been gained. I had not expected the honor of a conversation with you. I am obliged to you for your condescension.”

He waited, before he bade her good-evening, to watch her a moment; with that look which on a man’s face shows the crisis of some great agony in the soul—a look which the accident of his death might well stamp on Miss Bronson’s memory as long as she could remember any thing. But she had not a word for him—not one. She stood there in her elegant calm, so near to him that she could hear his sharp, hard breathing, as far from him as if oceans rolled between them. He remembered afterward that her silence was unusual even for her; also a certain strained repose in the folding of her hands which caught his eye, but which, in the passion of the moment, served only to work into a wandering fancy of his, that he was trying to move a block of beautiful marble.

Miss Bronson stood just where he had left her, long after he had gone. Once she started, with a quick motion, as if she would have called him back; then stopped herself, with a little scorn in her smile.

She knew this man loved her—loved her even to the peril of his life. Well, what then? You would have wondered, if you had seen her break sharply into her quick pacing on the graveled walk again; if you had watched her knotted forehead and cold, set lips, you would have wondered whether Robert M‘Ginley, who saw in her a very different woman from that solitary, self-sufficient figure, was dreaming of a shadow, or if he understood Miss Bronson better than she did herself. Back and forth, forth and back she went on her nervous walk, some excitement in her face serving only to give it a deeper chill. Was M‘Ginley a fool to want such a woman at his fireside? You, perhaps, would have said so, if you had seen her then, and have turned away as you would turn from an iceberg. Some one very candidly told him the same thing upon one occasion—a man who prided himself on his translation of women’s faces.

“Why, M‘Ginley, you haven’t but one eye open. She’s a beautiful woman, but she’d turn a fellow’s home into Pandemonium. It would be a violation of nature for her to be a wife. *She* must be the man, and she’d rule every thing with a rod of iron. To yield one inch of her own will would be torture to her.”

“I do not think so,” replied M‘Ginley, with a quiet smile. He might still have retained his opinion, for he was not a man who formed or rejected beliefs lightly; but he would not have smiled if he had seen her once that evening stop there in the darkening shadows and clench her

delicate hands upon her breast with a passion that fitted the half-frightened defiance in her eyes. Defiance? Of whom? of what? Perhaps of herself.

You think I am telling you of a woman who belongs only in poetry and romance. I assure you that I am not.

It was about an hour after M'Ginley had left her that one of the servants came hurriedly to the parlor window, near which she was sitting alone in the dark.

“Miss Margaret!”

“Oh, is it you, Dan? You gave Prince the extra quart of meal, as I told you, and sent my message to the gardener?”

“Yes, Miss Margaret, de work's all done gone out ob de way for de night. 'Tain't dat ar I come fur. 'Pears like I knows someting you'd oughter be telled on.”

Something in the negro's face arrested her attention.

“You may come in, Dan. What is it?”

“Nobody hedn't oughtet to be hearin' ob it, Miss Margaret. Der's no tellin' what might become ob we all ef dey did.”

“You may close the window, Dan.”

He closed it, and the door. He said then a few words to her scarcely above a whisper.

She changed color—as much as she ever did.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, clar sure, Miss Margaret. I war huntin' fur sassafras fur my ole woman—she's sot her heart on't she's done got de kersumption, an' der warn't nothin' for't but de sassafras—an' dey come 'long atween de trees—two ob 'em—an' I heerd every word, an' I neber breaf till dey get by, an' dey don' see me. Ef dey'd see me—laws! Miss Margaret, I wouldn't a' ben here ter tell.”

“What was the time to be, Dan?”

“Jes' ten 'clock, case I heerd 'em name it over affer dey'd got trough.”

Miss Bronson looked at her watch.

“You may lock up well, Dan, and the people can come into the kitchen if they are at all frightened. There is, however, nothing, I think, to fear. They will have work enough without coming into the town. And, Dan, I do not care to be disturbed this evening. I wish to be alone. Tell Rose and Eliza, if any thing is wanted, to wait till I call them.”

“Yes, Miss Margaret.”

She took off her crape mantle and began to fold it up, while she listened to his retreating footsteps; she smoothed every crease and carefully straightened the fringe. There was something curious in the mechanical action; perhaps an intensity of excitement which a word or a cry would have weakened.

Then she went to her own room, divested her dress of some of its feminine encumbrances, threw over her shoulders a dark, hooded cloak, examined her revolver and loaded it. After that she went hurriedly down stairs, out of the door, and into the street.

A great lurid moon glared through the mist that night, and the clouds that the wind tossed by it were stained with sullen red. M'Ginley watched its rise over the hill where they were encamped, with some odd fancy about its color and the last long day when it should set forever. His face had paled within the last hour. A certain hungry longing had crept into it—that longing which can not be mistaken, and which is so pitiful to see, especially in a man, and a man like Robert M'Ginley. I do not mean that he would have sought or deliberately chosen death; he was too thoroughly soldierly in the warp and woof of his nature for that. Margaret Bronson could

never make a sentimentalist, or that most cowardly of cowards—a suicide—out of him. But simply that, standing there apart from his comrades and their cheerful camp-fire talk that night, with the smothered passion of the reddened moonlight above and around him, and the memory of that one woman's face for his sole companionship, he may have thought— Well, I fancy death seemed a pleasant thing and fair to look upon. It had become so familiar to him in the life he led; it so dogged his steps and hedged him in; it talked with him in his dreams, and woke with him in the cool summer dawns; it basked in the glare of the sunlight and lurked in the evening shadows; it and his troubled life hung forever beside him, balanced in the chance of a single shot. He may have wondered, as he stood there with his face turned toward the sullen moon, and the group of pines below it, beyond which her home was hidden—he may have wondered a little—we all like to speculate at times as to what the world will be when we go out of it—whether the sight of his life-blood would thaw one jot of Miss Bronson's frozen elegance. Probably its contrast to the dazzling white of her own folded hands would not be pleasant. Probably she would beg them to care for him decently, and bury him out of her sight. Possibly she would say the country was making a terrible sacrifice of its young men—then go and dress for dinner.

Looking down through the trees where the shades of the valley hung and deepened, his eye caught at last the outline of a dim form threading its way through them. Its motion was rapid, its path direct to the camp. As it came out into the light in a little opening among the oaks, he saw the flutter of a woman's dress. He watched it curiously as it began the slow ascent over fallen trees and stumps and tangled underbrush. It was a dark, hooded figure, somewhat tall and erect, with a certain fearless disregard of the obstacles in the path, which was more natural to a man than a woman, and gave him for the instant a suspicion of disguise and treachery. Just then, however, the light struck full on a hand raised to push aside a dead bough—a slender, jeweled hand, that had an indescribable air of familiarity to him in the strained repose of its fingers. He saw also with distinctness her black dress whose trailing folds had been shortened out of reach of briars and rocks. She came up the slope under a shadow, through a gleam of lurid mist, then out upon a projecting rock beside him, where she stood quite still. Her hood had fallen off, her face was full in the light of the camp-fire.

“Miss Bronson!”

“I believe so.”

“*You* here, and alone!”

“I here and alone, Mr. M'Ginley, owing to the little circumstance that I have discovered a plot to surprise your camp to-night, with a force very conveniently outnumbering yours, every man of them thoroughly educated blood-hounds. Their calculations, if I remember rightly, comprised the butchery of two-thirds of you at the very lowest estimate; they attack you on the east side, at your weak point by the ravine. As to the time,” she coolly took out her watch, “if they had the virtue of punctuality they would have been here five minutes ago.”

“You are sure of this?”

“Perfectly, one of my people heard the whole thing discussed in the woods below you there. You remember Dan, perhaps? he is of a somewhat excitable temperament, but as to creating a story of any magnitude, it would be altogether too much of a tax upon his intellect. I think you may expect your visitors at any moment.”

All the soldier flashed into his face; for the moment he forgot her.

“Colonel! boys, where's the Colonel?”

“Thousands of pale women know”: Writing Women and the Civil War

She watched him as he sprang away from her. If he had seen her face he would have known how much he had heightened her respect for him because he *did* forget her on such an errand.

It was only for a moment. He was back beside her then; his face was pale.

“Margaret, it is terrible, you have saved us, but *you*—”

“I shall do very well. Why not?”

“You don’t know what a hell you have come into—*you!*” he passed his hand over his forehead; the great drops stood on it. “My God! if I could get you safe at home—only get you home!”

She smiled.

“I am not afraid. I should hardly have undertaken this little expedition if I had been afraid.” A sudden confusion prevented his reply—the sound of the Colonel’s voice, quick orders, and the men falling into line. Miss Bronson tossed off her cloak and took her pistol from her belt.

“What are you going to do?”

“Fight.”

“Miss Bronson!”

She threw off his hand from hers.

“Why not? I will not hide here in the bushes and die like a coward; no, not even for a look like that, Mr. M’Ginley. You know I could not go back if I would. See, they are calling you.”

The quick orders grew impatient; the ranks swept by them. M’Ginley fell into his place at the end of the line. Miss Bronson stepped beside him. He said but one word after that,

“Margaret!”

Her fingers stirred a little on the pistol; her glittering smile played all over her face. He knew then that she would have despised him if he had argued the case by so much as another syllable.

“They are coming,” she said, with a bit of triumph in her smile.

Her face was worth seeing, when the sergeant discovered her, and quietly ordered her out of the ranks.

“If you can tell me any reason, Sir, why I should *not* fight, I should like to know it.”

“Agin orders, mum.”

“But you are short of men.”

“Beggin’ your pardon, mum, I believe you hain’t a man.”

“What does that matter? I have no more fancy for looking on idle.”

“Can’t help it, mum, sorry to disappoint a lady; but there’s my orders. Wounded and women-folks and young uns to the rear. So, if you please mum, you’d better fall out.”

Miss Bronson obeyed in silent disgust. A woman’s will *versus* military discipline. Certainly it was a hard case.

A rustling of dead leaves in the ravine, a tramping of many feet, a flash of bayonets on the brow of the hill; then a vision of dark, exultant faces, a yell, a cheer, a thunder that woke all the echoes sleeping far down the valley; and the quiet camp became a battle-field.

The deserted fires flashing up broadly, darting rifts of light in through the smoke and horror, showed Miss Bronson standing under the trees. She stood there for five minutes. Then the fair-haired boy, fighting beside M’Ginley, fell with a ball through his heart.

When M'Ginley turned his head he saw her in the vacant place—the dead boy's musket in her hand.

"I prefer to be here," she said.

Probably military discipline would have had a word to say to its late defeated antagonist, if it had not been altogether too busy just then in the confusion of a charge. The picture, bright in the fitful glare, was one long to be remembered—the woman with her colorless, calm face and eyes on fire, the shadow of a smile still lingering on her lips, her black hair fallen low on her shoulders, and the fearless aim of the hand so womanly, so dazzling, so foreign to its deathly work.

She fought like a veteran. M'Ginley, so near to her, knew how her teeth were set, and could see her breast heave with her sharp, hard breathing. Once she looked up into his face.

"I don't know much about it; tell me if I am wrong."

The tone was a tone in which Margaret Bronson was unused to speaking; he heard every cadence of it above the roar of the musketry, and in that hour when she seemed to have thrown off her womanhood, he knew that she was nearer to him than ever in all her life before. After that he guided her.

"Aim higher, Margaret."

"You load in too much of a hurry, Margaret; you gain nothing by it."

"Margaret, you are out of the ranks."

So between his own fierce work—and she obeyed him as implicitly as a child. Throughout the whole he used instinctively the name by which he had called her when they played together in the old south field at home. She accepted it as instinctively. I think she liked it. Possibly it helped her; as to that you could not tell; she never quailed for an instant; her face never lost its colorless calm, her eyes their fire, nor her hand its fearless aim.

The camp-fires were dying low into their ashes; the moon's sullen glare from the tree-tops showed through the billows of smoke a breach in the enemy's ranks. The lines staggered and broke on the brow of the hill.

"We have them," said M'Ginley, with a grim smile, and fell with the words on his lips.

The ranks closed again and swept on victorious down the slope far into the valley to finish their work. But the beautiful woman's face was not among them.

She knelt down on the ground where he had fallen; his blood stained her dress in pitiful contrast to its silken richness.

"Can you tell me where it is?"

She spoke quietly; if she had had all the knowledge of the surgeons, and every means of saving his life at her command instead of being ignorant and alone in that desolated place, she could not have spoken more quietly; you could not have seen that a nerve trembled.

"It is nothing—only in my arm, I think," he said, feebly; "you can get home now, Margaret—go; don't stop to think of me."

"I *shall* think of you. I intend to save you."

She looked about her for a moment. At the right a rebel lay dead in the bushes. A few yards beyond another—dead or dying, for he stirred a little. No other human being was in sight. The distant camp-fires were out. The moon hung angrily in the mist; far down the valley the noise of the conflict was growing fainter; M'Ginley's hot blood was still staining her dress. Her sense of utter helplessness was written for an instant on her face; but it was turned away from him and he did not see it.

“Thousands of pale women know”: Writing Women and the Civil War

“You must stay here”—she spoke rapidly and decidedly—“you must stay here a little while. I shall help you into the bushes here out of sight, if there are stragglers round. I will bring some one that can take care of you. I think I can stop the flowing of this blood before I go.”

He was too weak to remonstrate. She took out her delicate laced handkerchief and tried to smile.

“If I only had one of Eliza’s cotton ones! It is so much cobweb.”

“Hold on, missis! You mought as well not spile that ere bit of nonsense, and save yerself the trouble ef bloodyin’ yer pretty hands. I’ve got a little business to do up with that Yankee sweet-heart o’ yourn.”

She sprang up, with her hand on her revolver.

The dying rebel had risen to his feet; there were no signs of death upon him; he had not so much as a wound. That he was a man of iron muscle, with brawny arms bared, and his bayonet dripping with blood, she saw; that his face was the face of a fiend, she felt.

“What’s the matter with yer? Struck dumb? Purty good-looking gal ye are, any ways. Shall be sorry to skeer ye, but I’m ’bliged to settle up ’counts with that ’ere chap; and you’d better git out of the way, ef ye ain’t partiklar ’bout seein’ it did.”

She stepped out into the open path. M’Ginley called her back; but she made no answer.

“You shall not touch him: he is a wounded man.”

“Hoity toity, pretty mistress! We’ll see about that. He killed my boy in th’ fight, he did. Little chap was drafted in las’ week. He’s lycin’ back thar ’mong the tents. I’ll have my pay fur that. Didn’t the little fellow lie an’ groan? An’ I’ll see *him* lie an’ groan, an’ send him whar he b’longs: yer mought jes’ as well make up yer mind to’t firs’ as las’. An’ I wouldn’t screech ef I was you, ’cause it won’t make no odds ter me.”

He laughed, wiping his dripping bayonet on his sleeve. I suppose most women would have fallen on their knees at this crisis, have pleaded and sobbed, wrung their hands, and made allusions to his wife or his mother; also to some faint possibility termed his better nature. Margaret Bronson read the brutish instinct of revenge in the man’s face too thoroughly for that; she knew it would be but wasted time, and time was precious.

She stepped up to him, with her fingers clasped on her deathly weapon as steadily as they had clasped it all that horrible night.

“Margaret!”

It was M’Ginley’s anguished voice. She heard it. The man, wiping his bayonet, looked into her white still face with dull wonder.

“What ye up to? I’m goin’ to work now.”

“You are not going to touch him.”

“That ’ere’s purty talk, mistress, when I dropped dead o’ purpose for the chance to run him through—ve-ry purty talk!”

“Step back there! If you come another step you are a dead man.”

“Should be sorry to fight a gal; have done it, though, ’fore now; an’ gal or no gal, I’ll put an eend to the chap. Here, you Yank! it’s time to be a sayin’ your prayers.”

The bayonet gleamed within a yard of Margaret Bronson’s heart.

“Either you or I are dead before you stir,” she said. The red light struck full on her face.

“Margaret! Margaret!”

She quivered a little; but her eyes did not move from the steel that flashed just then in a moonbeam.

M'Ginley, trying to crawl to his feet, fell, repeating her name over feebly. He could not reach her. She heard him groan. She was very pale, but she stood like a statue.

The man laughed; as men will laugh upon a volcano.

"Come, come, my pretty fire-brand; I reckon we've had enough of this 'ere play."

The bayonet flashed; the face darkened; he threw up his arms, and, with an oath that she heard on still nights for years and years of her life, fell backward down upon the rocks.

The Doctor, coming out of the parlor where they had laid M'Ginley on the couch, found Miss Bronson washing her hands.

"You're not at it again! You were doing that very thing when I came out after the bandages, Miss Bronson."

She laughed—nervously.

"I don't know. Was I? I had forgotten it."

"You are too white; let me feel your pulse. I *should* like to know how you managed to get him down here?"

"I believe I came down after Dan and Caesar, didn't I? Let me think; yes—that was it. I believe I am a little tired."

"A baby would give up the ghost with such a pulse; you must have stimulant. Do you know that you can not stand?"

"Yes, I can; nothing is the matter. I shall do very well."

But she sat down weakly, and leaned her forehead on her hand.

"You don't ask how my patient is, Miss Bronson?"

"I supposed you would not wish to be annoyed with questions in a dangerous case."

"It is not dangerous: it is a severe flesh wound and slight fracture, but with suitable care there's no danger about it. He is quiet now—comfortable, he says. He wishes to see you."

She rose slowly.

"Are you sure?"

"Is it a very impossible supposition when you have saved his life? My dear Miss Bronson, you are somewhat mazed by your night's work, surely. I shall insist upon a glass of brandy."

"No, you are very good; I would rather not. If you are sure he wishes to see me I will go in."

She went in—not as Miss Bronson had ever entered her own parlor before; her step was faltering, perhaps timid.

"Margaret."

She came across the room at his call, and stood beside him with her head bent, her hands folded tightly into each other. The crimson stains on her rich dress, her falling hair which she had neglected or forgotten to arrange, and the flutter of her drooping eyelids, were in sharp contrast to her usual elegant repose. Yet I think she was not the less beautiful. Perhaps to Robert M'Ginley she was not less imperial.

"Margaret," he said, feebly, "I wanted to see you."

She sank down on the floor so low that she could look up into his face, and he saw in her eyes what he had never seen there before—tears.

"Margaret! Why, Margaret!"

A sudden light shone in his pallid face; perhaps it dazzled her; she bent her head.

"Are you *sure* you wanted to see me?"

"Margaret, look at me."



“Thousands of pale women know”: Writing Women and the Civil War

She looked at him.

“I thought”—she trembled in every nerve, this woman who had gone into battle with a smile—“I thought you would not want to see me. I was afraid you would always think of me up there in the blood and smoke, it seems so terrible now it is over. I wonder if I shall ever forget it?”

“You seem to forget that you saved my life,” huskily.

The words stung her somehow.

“I do not want you to be grateful to me.”

She turned away her head—not haughtily, but very humbly; it drooped again so low that her hair fell over her face.

“Margaret.”

She stirred a little.

“Margaret, I have loved you a great while, but I never loved you as I did to-night.”

She looked up with a quick smile that broke like sunlight all over her face—a tender, happy smile like a child’s. She looked up, and simply spoke his name; but Robert M‘Ginley knew then, and from that hour he never doubted, that she had no wish on earth so dear as his happiness, no joy so sweet as his love.

## CHAPTER SIX

“REPLACE THE OLD BRUTAL HEROISMS”: WRITING WOMEN’S ADVENTURES

Mavourneen  
Wrecked in Port  
The Chief Operator

## INTRODUCTION

Throughout her career, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps wrote essays that called for massive changes in women's rights. She grounds her call for reformed education and career opportunities for women in her own upbringing, in which, as a professor's daughter, she was afforded an exemplary education and used that background to build a career as a self-supporting writer. Phelps wrote to girls and to women in the leading periodicals, and she exhorted them to pursue education and to work at whichever employment they felt called to and could profit by. She asked them to support female ministers and physicians. She called on them to work for female suffrage and women's property rights. She argues that the true woman intended by God will not be seen until the following conditions, among others, are fulfilled:

When women are admitted to their rightful share in the administration of government; when the state ceases to expend a dollar more for the education of its boys than of its girls; when public sentiment not only does not deny to them, but imposes upon them, a standard of intellectual culture not one whit inferior to and in no wise different from that imposed upon men; when 2/3rds of the practicing physicians in the world are women; when marriage and motherhood no more complete a woman's mission to the world than marriage and fatherhood complete a man's. ("True," 1871, 1)

In her fiction, Phelps created these ideal conditions in various ways; her fiction is peopled with educated women working as physicians and in other nontraditional roles. She also wrote essay after essay calling on women to be brave enough to take their full part in their society, to enact her envisioned reforms in real life.

The stories in this chapter offer brave women so intent on doing their duty that they face death without flinching. They are stories about women's adventures, narratives as exciting as Mark Twain's adventure stories about boys and as domestic as Louisa May Alcott's adventure stories about girls. Like Alcott's, Phelps's female heroes come to their perils through combinations of domestic duties and happenstance. Like Alcott's Jo March, Phelps describes herself as a "very much of a tomboy . . . far more likely to have been found on the top of an apple-tree or walking the length of the seminary fence than writing rhymes" (*Chapters* 20). The young mother in "Mavourneen," the stubborn grandmother in "Wrecked in Port," and the courageous widow in "The Chief Operator" are not political activists, but they demonstrate in compelling narratives, that women have the courage and tenacity to adventure their way to the outcomes they desire.

## THE STORIES

"Mavourneen" appeared in the *Christian Watchman and Reflector* 22 March 1866: 4.

"Wrecked in Port" first appeared in *Hearth and Home* 14 September 1872: 710-11. It was collected in Phelps's short fiction anthology *Sealed Orders* (Boston: Houghton, 1879: 114-28).

"The Chief Operator" first appeared in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 119 (July 1909): 300-08. It was anthologized in Phelps's collection *The Oath of Allegiance and Other Stories* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1909: 353-74).

## MAVOURNEEN<sup>68</sup>

Every one knew it at the time. Its counterpart happened not many months ago, and brings back the memory of the earlier story—not much of a story, perhaps. It was “only an Irish woman;” only the wrecking of an emigrant ship with three hundred souls on board, of which this woman was one.<sup>69</sup>

She had forgotten that. To her there was one life only upon the sinking ship for which the great waves waited and yawned and cried; and that life was not her own—it was the little baby’s.

She had her arms folded round him in a curious way, crouched there in the stern—the other end of the ship was settling slowly. Her eyes had a curious look in them, too. Did you ever see a tiger defending her young?

She stood quite alone. The women were huddled together, as is their fashion in danger, with shrieks and sobs and wringing of hands and noisy prayers; the men, too, were on their knees here and there, or, with such rough words of comfort as they knew, looked into the eyes of women clinging to them, or lashed a child to a plank.

But she was apart and alone. There seemed to be none to care for her. There were no arms but her own to fold about the child. They two only had come out to find the new life of the beautiful, free “Ameriky;” they two only were waiting together for death.

“It’s as well, maybe,” she muttered, drawing her scanty black dress close about the child’s face; the spray was washing up so high now.

“Arrah! Kathleen, woman, down on yer knees, an’ be sayin’ yer prayers, for the blissed Mither save us; but the cap’n says there’s no sail to be seen at all,” said one of the women between her sobs. Kathleen raised her eyes slowly.

“An’ it’s so, then? I thought maybe the guns would be bringin’ soombody. You see he’s all I’ve got.”

The sullen, incessant boom of the gun drowned whatever else she would have said. The water was rising slowly; the cold spray dashed upon her face.

She sat down a moment weakly, the child strained in her arms till it cried out for pain. Her eyes wandered away from it for the moment, to the groups where husband comforted wife, and father was saving child.

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<sup>68</sup> Mavourneen is an Irish Gaelic term of endearment usually used for women, contracted from *mo mhuirín*, translates as my darling. The popular song “Kathleen Mavourneen” was written by Frederick Nicholls Crouch (1808-1896) around 1837, with lyrics by Louisa Macartney Crawford (1790-1858).

<sup>69</sup> The Irish Potato Famine, known in Ireland as the Great Hunger, peaked between 1845 and 1855, and devastated the Irish population in the nineteenth century. The famine resulted in mass emigration, and in the antebellum period over a million Irish immigrants came to the United States. Most settled where they landed, and by 1850, a quarter of the populations of Boston, New York, and Philadelphia were Irish. This mass exodus by sea was accompanied by many shipwrecks. Phelps offers no date for the story; therefore, the two wrecks she mentions could be any of a large number, including the *St. John*, wrecked off the coast of Massachusetts with the loss of over one hundred lives. Thoreau visited the wreck site, which inspired his essay “The Shipwreck” (1855).

“Dennis would a saved him, maybe; Dennis would.”

She said only that for a while, muttering it over as the great waves yawned and cried. Then she murmured—

“Leastways, there’d a ben soombody here to kiss me.”

The boom of the gun, the shriek of the wind and the hungry gasping of the waves fitted into her thought of death. The ignorant, Romish superstitions meant as much to her as our happier faith to you and me. The sweet tenderness of the woman and the mother-love by which she groped her way to God held a rare charm for her in that hour. Had not the Virgin Mary held just such a helpless little face within her arms? Had she not seen it thorn-crowned, bleeding, crucified? Would she not be sorry for Kathleen, sitting there to see her baby die—quite alone without Dennis to help her—far away from the blossoming fields of Kilkenny, where Dennis lay under the daisies—sitting with the sharp spray in her face to feel her baby die?

Not that she put the thought in such words.

“The blessed Mither! Maybe she’ll understand.”

That comprehended to her the whole.

They all had their stories, these men and women crouched there with slow death crawling on them. They were all living in those moments experiences just such as kings and counsellors of the earth may live in other moments like them. They had little care for the solitary woman who had no one to help her die, or she for them, perhaps. Her thought was so single. It held nothing but the boy’s face.

He wakened and cried once, as a high wave broke over the stern.

She began to sing to him softly an old Irish lullaby, with words of her own now and then.<sup>70</sup>

“Mither will go with him, baby-boy. Mavourneen won’t have to go alone. Mavourneen! Mavourneen!”

That softened her eyes a little. They would slip down into the seething swell of the waves together, and nobody could take him out of her arms to bury him. There would be no long living on without him; no day in the wide “Ameriky” into which he should never come.

She turned her face to the stretch of boiling sea, looking out over it with a vague, troubled wonder in her eyes. If she should find Dennis somewhere—perhaps. Muttering the next instant a prayer to be forgiven for the thought.

She watched the water rise after that quietly. Up to the deck-railing, rippling over her feet, surging about her arms and the child’s face. The ship was long in parting.

She sang on, and the baby slept. She sang on till the crash came and the thunder broke over her head. She sang on with a voice like a bell, low and clear and sweet, to the words of the old Irish lullaby that the baby loved to hear; and she went down singing.

The crash and the thunder; the hiss of the great whirlpool sucking down the ship; the groans and cries and arms upraised; the pallid faces flashing down out of sight, and flashing up, and circling round the whirling gulf, and drawn in and out of sight again—it had all passed like a dream when one awaketh, and the schooner, coming with its late relief, did what it could. Of the three hundred and thirty tossed upon the waves, they drew them up together, the living and the dead. One woman they found with arms, that the agony of strangulation had not been able to

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<sup>70</sup> Phelps implies that “Kathleen Mavourneen” came to America with Irish immigrants. Little is known about the song’s lyricist, but Crouch, an immigrant Englishman, eventually became a Confederate supporter.

unloose, folded about her baby. There were tender faces looking on, and skilled, womanly hands. What they did, they did quickly; and the child lived and the woman.

She used to think, in her dim way, sitting there upon the deck through the sunny days, and crooning the old lullaby, that He meant something by this who had ordered it so. Surely, the new life to which they were going would bring all she hoped—honest work, strong hands, unshadowed days, long years to watch the boy growing up into his manhood—all this must be, else why were not their's among the pallid faces floating upturned and still, miles away on the soft summer sea?

Who cares for the musings of an ignorant Irish woman who could neither read nor write? A woman with rough hands, with rough speech, with uncouth, foreign ways; nothing beautiful about her but the mute brown eyes that Dennis loved.

Yet they were not so unlike, perhaps, to yours or mine, after all. They were simple enough—only pictures of the cabin in Kilkenny, with its little garden-patch, and the low fence, and the light on the potato vines, and the old cat purring sleepily on the wooden step. She had a foolish fancy that she wanted to take the creature with her; Dennis used to pat it when he came home from work at night. But they laughed at her, and said there were plenty better in America. Ah! well, perhaps—what was there not in America? But Dennis never was there. He had always meant to go. She never expected to go alone. It was a little hard leaving the old cabin. It was hard to go away from the daisied grave, left forever alone now, with no one to cry over it a bit, or say an Ave Maria there sometimes at twilight.

But for the boy's sake. The boy must grow up in a free country. Dennis always meant it; he said he should go to school; he should make more of a man than his father.

“Arrah! be as much uv a man, Mavourneen, an' I'll be askin' no more of ye,” hiding her face in the child's neck with a sob and a smile. The baby would answer as babies will, with the silly little coo that only mother thinks otherwise than absurd, and Kathleen would pelt him with her kisses, and look into his eyes—blue eyes like the “the fayther's”—and remember that he was all her own, and cry softly for very joy.

He bounded all her future; what else had she to make a future? Many pleasant dreams came to her in the pauses of her singing, of the new land which was to be his and her's. Dreams of a tiny house hidden away somewhere under a hill, with a garden like the garden in Kilkenny, and a bit of a white curtain at the window; of sitting out in the sunshine with the baby in her arms; of his little feet grown old enough to patter about among the clover-leaves; of his trudging off to school with his book under his arm, and spelling out the mystery of the printed letters to her—he would know so much more than his mither, the little rogue! But mither would be just proud to have it so. Dreams, too, of the taller boy, with the mischief bright in his merry blue eyes; of the bearded man, who had learned a trade, and voted for President “along with the gentlemen,” of days like summer days, and an old age ending like a merry song, with the child's own boys upon her knee.

For where was ever land like this land to which they were going? Who ever heard of beggary and crime, of hunger, or cold, or starving faces, of wretched days or suffering nights, disease or pain, within its borders? “A shadowy land of Eden, lying dark in purple spheres of red”—this was America to Kathleen, as to so many of Kathleen's like.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Phelps quotes from “Locksley Hall” by Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892), but changes the line from “Summer isles of Eden lying in dark purple spheres of sea” (164).

And so, with sunny musings on the sunny dock, the days passed, and the nights, to Kathleen, and there fell a great calm, and the ship floated idly over the hot, summer sea. There was no rain and no wind. The water grew scant and impure, and a stealthy disease crept in among the crew. Five times at night a heavy burden was dropped slowly over the vessel’s side. Five times Kathleen listened in the crowded steerage to hear the plunge, and folded her arms about her baby in that curious way she had.<sup>72</sup> One morning a wind arose, and a cloud no bigger than a man’s hand; the ship sped away under full sail, and the child drooped upon her knees.

She sat up on deck with him to get the air, her eyes upon his face, her figure motionless. She had little to say. Sometimes when they spoke to her she raised her head slowly:

“He’ll git well. It’s all I’ve got, ye see.”

Sometimes too, they could catch the sound of the crooning lullaby. It came to hold but one word. “Mavourneen, Mavourneen,” that only, over and again.

Faster and farther the ship flew under the brave wind. They were making up for lost time now. The port would soon be reached, and the wide America, and a shaded room, and rest and life to the child, and the golden future stretching away for him and for her.

“Mavourneen, Mavourneen,” sang she, hopefully and clear, in trills, in quavers, in chants, in low breathings, like a prayer.

Faster and farther, on and away. The wind was fresh, but the child lay still. “Land ho!” came the cry and a purple distance rose faintly against the horizon of blue and green. It deepened and darkened, and broke into ragged outlines. Lighthouses loomed up at right and left, and lines of reefs frowned high into the air.

“Mavourneen, Mavourneen,” sang the woman, seeing nothing, in merry brave strains that ended in a dirge, and struggled into merry, brave strains again.

But the wind was gay, though the child lay still, and the harbor stretched out blue and bright; the fair ship shot into it and over it, and eyes were eager for waiting homes, and the beautiful land, the Eden-land, the land that Dennis had chosen for his boy, unfolded picture after picture in the morning sunlight.

“Mavourneen, Mavourneen,” sang the woman, and the sailors turned away their faces, the word had grown to be such a cry.

Some one came up and touched her shoulder.

“It’s no use, you poor creature, don’t you see?”

She looked up with that look like a tiger in her eyes.

“Whisht, noo! It’s slapin’ he is, and he like the singin’.”

They looked on dumbly, and she began once more.

“Mavourneen, Mavourneen,” and all at once the voice stopped utterly.

She turned the little face over to the light, turned it back and said no word.

The boats put off, and skimmed over the shallow water, and grated against the wharf. Eye met eye, hand grasped hand, heart leaped to heart, and there were tender words and happy greetings, and hurrying to treasured homes.

“We’ve got there, Mavourneen,” said the woman quietly, “I guess we’ll get out noo, you an’ me.”

She rose, with her arms folded over her silent burden, and slowly followed the crowd, and disappeared among them on the wharf.

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<sup>72</sup> Because one in five steerage passengers died en route, the ships carrying Irish immigrants came to be known as “coffin ships.”

## Mavourneen

There was no place for Kathleen in all the happy city, no waiting home, no tender eyes, no voice to speak to her of that little face under her shawl.

Like a drop in an ocean she vanished, a stranger in a strange land, with none to take her in. And what became of her? Who cares to know? Only an Irish girl!

Perhaps in some mother's nursery, where life runs like a story, and the happy children play, she sits and croons a lullaby to another woman's little face, on which the tears drop now and then. But there is one word it never hears. How shall Kathleen sing the Lord's song in a strange land?



## WRECKED IN PORT

I never set out here to the mouth of the harbor, anchored or becalmed (your line's taut, sir!), or similarly or otherwise at my leisure to take a fair squint inwards at the town, but I wonder what it may be like to go stark, staring mad.

If you'll haul in a mite faster now, it'll be better for you, and just as well for the fish. That's about it.

I've noticed it about our cod, they know when I take gentlemen out, as well as I know myself. They'll take advantage of you, if they can, most any day. Maybe it's a professional preference, or a political, I'm sure I couldn't say. I'd be willing to grant a Gloucester cod his choice of either, and then admit that he might have a mixed motive to bottom of it.<sup>73</sup> It's natural enough, brought up as they are from infancy on the Fishery Question, with views more or less decided and distinct.<sup>74</sup>

A little blue you are about the mouth, sir. I'd lay down if I was you. It's better for you, and quite as well for the fish, as I said before, and I'm used to it, bless you! When it is too rough for a gentleman outside, and it very often is, I always say: "Just lay down and take it easy, and leave the cod to me." He takes as many pound home to his wife come night, I reckon, and nobody the wiser for it, and who'll ask questions? Not me, nor yet the cod. How does that go? There! When there's a mite less embarrassment between yourself, sir, and your stomach, I'll explain to you the feeling I had occasion to mention about the harbor mouth, and looking inwards at the town.

Well—and yet it a'n't so easy to explain. Most things a'n't. I've told it times enough, and yet not the whole of it either. There are folks, you know, you can talk to, and again there are folks you can't. There are boarders in the little hall chamber, not to mention names, I would n't tell Jib Hancko's story to, not for a week's board outright; but a pleasant way, sir, and an honest, as between man and man, and no complaining of the coffee, and not staving the dories in regardless because they a'n't your own, and a kind of forethought for the cabbages if the garden lays between you and the bathing-house, why, that's a different thing.

You'll remember of hearing of the great gale of 1839?<sup>75</sup> No! You don't say! It's a surprising thing to me how ignorant folks are in the country. There are some smart men come from the country, too.

We were booked for Boston when the great gale of '39 came up. It was the last voyage I took to Boston. Fact is, I may as well own it was the last voyage I took anywhere. I wasn't born

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<sup>73</sup>Gloucester is a city on the east coast of Massachusetts, on Cape Ann, at the top of deeply sheltered Gloucester Bay. It was a former center of the whaling industry and the site of Phelps's summer home.

<sup>74</sup>The Fishery Question was an ongoing debate from the late eighteenth century through the twentieth between the United States and Great Britain about who held the right to fish the Atlantic. It became an especially heated debate through the 1850s.

<sup>75</sup>The Great Gale of 1839 was a storm along the Massachusetts coast with a near shipwreck on which Phelps bases this story. During the storm, the *Cambridge* was stranded in the Charles River at Boston when her captain could not find a tugboat to tow him into harbor. The ship slipped her anchors and was nearly destroyed.

## Wrecked in Port

with a reef-knot between my fingers, never boarded a fishing-smack that I didn't feel I'd as lief's be boarding my coffin, and that gale made a landlubber of me once for all.

We cleared from Wiscasset, along about the first week, if I recollect, the first week of December, in the schooner Pansie, with a cargo of lath and piles. We had about fifty thousand feet of lath aboard. Griggs was our cap'n. He belonged in Wiscasset. He had his mother aboard. She was an old lady, over seventy year old. He was taking her to Boston to spend the winter with her daughter.

"The old lady enjoys it, having these fair blows," says he one day to Hancko, standing aft. "She isn't much of a sailor."

"Did you ever see a woman that was?" asked Hancko. Jib Hancko was mate.

"Well, I don't know," says the cap'n.

"I have," says I. And so I had. But she wasn't aboard the Pansie that trip, thank heaven! and it wasn't necessary to specify where she was, as I remarked to Jib when he made the inquiry. She went to the Banks with me once along with her father, who was skipper of the smack.<sup>76</sup> You wouldn't believe, to see her turning over a griddle-cake or a cruller now, what a sailor she was. She hauled a catch as big as mine right along any day; the only thing she failed up on was taking out the vitals. It was while I was to work on the vitals of her mackerel to spare her tender eyes that I first began to think of her. She was down to Calais, visiting a cousin of hers, when I took that trip to Boston.

The skipper's mother was a kind of cute old lady to see round. She sat on deck most every day, mending up Griggs's shirts. She set the world by Griggs. She used to stop me most every time I happened round, and say:

"My son's taking me to Boston to spend the winter with my daughter. He said it shouldn't cost me nothing. My daughter's children have got the whooping-cough, and she though she'd like to have me come."

Then the next time I came along she had it over—"My son's taking me to Boston. He said it should n't cost me nothing. My daughter's children have got the whooping-cough"—just the same.

Some of the boys laughed at the old lady; but I couldn't, some way; she looked so cute, sitting up there on deck, mending Griggs's shirts.

Jib Hancko used to play backgammon with her (not that the old woman could play backgammon more'n a monk-fish, but she thought she could, and that amounted to the same thing, as it does with most of us in most things), and find her knitting-needles for her, and set her up easy with her shawls in the sunny spots among the piles.

Jib set almost as much by the skipper as the old lady did herself. He and Griggs had run this coast together, master and mate, some half a dozen years; they always were agreeable to one another's women-folks; at least Griggs would have been, no doubt, but Jib hadn't any himself—not a living woman. He courted a girl once down our way, up to Squam; she was washed off the rocks at Little Good Harbor, at a picnic, one day; I never heard of any other.

Before the trip was over, I was glad of it, too. I've heard that's where Griggs got the name of that schooner, but I can't say. All I know is, that was the given name of the young woman—Pansie; and she was painted about the time of the funeral. Griggs was a polite fellow about such things.

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<sup>76</sup>The Grand Banks, off the coast of Newfoundland/Labrador, are one of the largest and richest fisheries in the world.

I don’t believe you’ll ever see a nicer day, sir, this side of heaven, than I saw aboard the Pansie on Saturday, the 14<sup>th</sup> of December, 1839. It blew from sou’-sou’-west as softly as a woman singing to a baby. There were clouds, a few of them, of color like mother-of-pearl, curling at the edges like a shell, and the noon warmed up warm as a May-day overhead. Some of the boys went in for a swim, it looked so warm. The old lady sat on deck without her extra shawls, and the skipper was afraid she’d take cold.

“You’ll be in Boston to-morrow, God willing, mother,” says the skipper (the skipper was a pious man at times, a Methodist), “and I’d be sorry to take you in all hoarsed up; Keziah would think I hadn’t taken good care of you.”

Upon this the old lady pipes up again:

“My son will take me into Boston to-morrow. Keziah’s children have got the whooping-cough, and she thought she’d like to see me!”

I noticed Griggs putting on her shawl for her, and putting on her shawl for her, half the afternoon; the old lady dropped it off, and dropped it off; finally, Jib Hancko got a little shingle-nail and pinned it together for her through the fringe.

It was on towards five o’clock that I saw the mate stand talking in a confidential way alone in the stern with the skipper. Except when under orders, he was on very confidential terms with Griggs. He nods, and Griggs nods, and Hancko points to the sou’-east, and the skipper nods again, and walks the deck a bit, and stops to ask the old lady how she feels, and back again to the mate; but I couldn’t make head nor tail of them until six o’clock, when we got an order to tack and put into Gloucester over night.

The captain did n’t like the looks of the sou’-east; thought there was an ugliness, more or less, in it; may be there was mischief ahead, and maybe there wasn’t; having his mother aboard, he thought he’d be on the safe side; any way, there was the order: Into Gloucester over night.

We got it round among us, by degrees, as we rounded Eastern Point—it’s never any nonsense rounding Eastern Point—and sulky enough we were about it, too. One of the lads had a young one with the croup in Boston, he’d counted on seeing by Sunday night. Couple of ’em had tickets to a dance in a Mariner’s Tavern. Most of ’em wanted liquor. One of ’em—his name was Ben Bumper—said:

“D—n the old lady!”

Next minute he lay on deck for it, flat as a griddle-cake. He didn’t count on the mate’s being round when he made the observation.

Jib Hancko was a little man with a squint eye; but when his blood was up he looked more like a likeness I’ve seen of Giant Despair, in a book called the Pilgrim’s Progress, than any other man alive I ever come across.

Well, so we put into port, and anchored—just about there; no, a little further to your right; just beyond that red buoy where you see the very young gentleman’s dory tied to fish, and the young lady in the red jacket screeching at the bait.

That was about half-past six. It had freshened up a little, but no more than you’d expect of any high-spirited December evening. Half a dozen of the lads wanted to put over into Fresh Water Cove for a lark; but Griggs was obstinate as a mule; he kept all hands aboard, and mad as hornets.

We had neighbors plenty by nine o’clock, but none too many. There’s always shipping enough runs in for a night’s lodging to Gloucester; always was, even in those days. Griggs brought the old lady up to see the lights of the Harbor—by which we meant the town there, same as we mean it now—and the twinkle of the shipping, red as blood and green as grass, to

## Wrecked in Port

starboard and to port, while sailing in; and the pale flame-color of the lanterns swinging on the anchored craft.

But the old lady only said she'd rather her son would take her into Boston, and she was afraid her daughter's children would sit up late for her, and that was very bad for children with the whooping-cough.

It was about midnight that the blow stood up—about midnight between the Saturday and the Sunday of the fourteenth and the fifteenth days of December, 1839.

From that hour until Tuesday morning there was no rest in the heavens above, nor the earth beneath, nor the waters under the earth, for the soul nor for the body of any of them that go out in ships and down into the sea along this Massachusetts coast; and though I say it that shouldn't, being a good citizen, and voting the straight Republican ticket year in and out, it's the awfulest, cruelest, coldest coast I ever trusted to the mercy of, or the honor of, or the fellow-feeling of, from the time I first set foot on ship-board to this day.

If you look over the Eastern Light there you'll see how it must have struck that sheer wall of rock on the Fresh Water side.

It struck as straight as an arrow from the sou'-east. And as sharp. It was more the sharpness than the heft at the beginning. It snowed a little, too, in a sleety way; that's the worry of a gale. I'd rather it would rain a deluge.

Howsoever, being at anchor, and in port, we thought no more of it than to own the skipper knew his business as well as we did, and to chaff Ben Bumper on that little remark of his concerning the old lady, at spare minutes, until the morning.

All the solemn, roaring, blinding night, the ships came scudding in from open sea for shelter. I watched them, being aloft to secure the to'-gallant sail against a wrench of any kind, with a serious feeling in my mind I couldn't have found reasons to explain. They were so still about it, and so many; it occurred to my thoughts towards morning that they were unusual many, and the blood-red lanterns that have struck your fancy so, sir, smoking off the rocks by my house of a quiet evening, gave me a notion that was most surprising about wounded creatures that the rocks had gored.

When the Sunday morning lifted, the masts were thick as mosquitoes at a lighted window, all up and down the harbor. The sky was dull as death. Off over the Point, along by the Niles's woods there, a little palish streak lay, of a sort of salmon color, and with an unpleasant twitch across it, like a winking man. On account of the swinging of the schooner, and the swinging of our neighbors, and the slope of the swell before the eyes, all Gloucester shores seemed waltzing in a horrid waltz; and what was curious about it, was to see them waltzing to the time beat by the Sunday church-bells. They rang at half-past nine at the Harbor, and I could see folks, like specks, stir through the icy spray to go to meeting. I couldn't help wondering that morning if any of them said their prayers for folks at sea. Not that we looked for any mischief at that hour, and who ever thought to pray for folks in port?

It blew all the morning and it blew all the afternoon.

The skipper came up about dinner-time, and says to the mate:

“I wish I had the old lady ashore to-day.”

But we could have got to China as easy as we could have got ashore—some three or four boats'-lengths—on to the awful rocks of Fresh Water Cove, that Sunday noon.

Yes, sir, it looks still enough over there now, and green and soft, and kindly to the eye; and the foam against the rocks falls and rises in a pleasant manner, much like the muslin curtain, I often think, that hangs in our big parlor-window. See how Half-way Rock looms to-day? And

the purple color that hangs on Norman’s Woe? You should have walked up and down Niles’s beach and looked at Norman’s Woe on that Sunday noon, the 15<sup>th</sup> of December, 1839. They said it looked like the mouth of the Bottomless Pit; and that the spray rolled up like smoke.

By two o’clock they’d begun to go ashore. A brig and two schooners broke there in the Sunday daylight before our eyes. One smashed to splinters just above us here. She was from Mount Desert; I forget the name. An old man and his three boys went down. I could see them dropping off like flies. You see the rigging froze so, and everything you touched glazed over and slipped up. It blew all the afternoon, and it blew all the evening.

A little to the fore of midnight, the skipper sent Hancko below after the old lady. Jib brought her up, and they tied her to the mainmast with a tippet she was knitting for her daughter’s children, and almost broke her heart. Griggs would have her on deck, and handy. Heaven nor earth couldn’t tell, he said, what would come next.

“Good God!” says he, “if this goes on, we shall go down at anchor like a baby’s raft!”

To say that that two-hundred-and-fifty-tonner just swashed, sir, like the chips you’re throwing in this minute, a’n’t to say anything about it. To say that we couldn’t tell one minute from another, whether we stood on our keel or our mainmast, a’n’t to give you an idea. To say how the gale put arms under us, and clutched us in, and then stepped back an awful step or two, over Easter Point, and down with its head, and *bunted* at us, and up with its shoulders and h’isted us along, dead against the rock, a’n’t to express nor to imply it.

To say that at midnight of that Sunday night, all Hell opened under Gloucester Harbor, is to draw upon your imagination, sir; but it’s the best I can do.

Five minutes after twelve, the cry came up:

“We’ve slipped our anchor!”

Five minutes more, and we were on the rocks.

“If we don’t swamp before we’ve time to break,” cries the skipper, “there’s chance for a rope. Volunteers for a rope, my lads!”

For folks were upon shore from the village, and cries came up, and every time the sound cut through the thunder, the Pansie leaped as if she would answer to it, and rammed herself between the teeth of the breakers like a wedge.

We looked at one another, but no man stirred.

Said Ben Bumper, “D—n a rope!”

Said Jib Hancko, slowly, “I guess I’ll go.”

But the skipper turned round on him—says he:

“I’d go myself if it wasn’t for the old lady. Anyhow, I won’t send you, Jib. Who’ll hold ont’ the old lady if I don’t get acrost?”

“I’ll hold ont’ the old lady,” said Jib Hancko, slow as ever; “but I’d rather go myself, Cap’n Griggs.”

“Hold your tongue!” roars Griggs through the bellow of the blast. “I won’t send you if nobody goes, Jib Hancko! If I don’t get acrost, you hold ont’ the old lady, will you, Jib?”

“Ay, ay, sir,” says Jib.

“And if I do get acrost, you’ll hold ont’ the old lady, will you, Jib? She’s to come over first, you understand—do you, Jib?”

“Ay, ay, sir,” says Jib.

With that, the skipper steps up and kisses the old lady, before us all, once on one cheek, and once on the other.

“Good-by, mother!” says he.

## Wrecked in Port

But the old lady only wrung her hands and said they'd spoiled Charles Henry's tippet, and she was very cold.

Well, so Griggs set off with the rope. It was an ugly job. Twice we thought he'd gone, and three times we thought he'd gone, and once the mate struck his two fists together so the blood come from his knuckles.

"The rope's parted!" says he.

But next minute through the hellish noise we heard the skipper's voice, and saw, through the thin and broken shine of lanterns that folks held on shore, that the rope lay over, safe and sound.

Now, would you believe it, sir, that after that, that old creature wouldn't budge an inch? I declare, it makes me feel bad to think of it, to this day.

"Come, mother?" said Jib Hancko, hurrying her up in a gentle way, for we were terribly strained and mangled, and no time to lose. But she sat and wrung her hands—quite crazed by fright and cold, and crying out:

"My son's carrying me to Boston to spend the winter with my daughter! He said it shouldn't cost me nothing! My daughter's children have got the whooping-cough!"

Do our best, we couldn't stir her, hide nor hair.

"Lord A'mighty!" said Jib Hancko. But after that he held his tongue. He went and sat down by the old lady, and untied her tippet from her, and put his arms around her. The cargo leaped and struck at them, in plunging over. I saw blood upon his head and face. He wiped it off with his lee elbow, so the old lady shouldn't see it. He sat crouched up a little to keep the timber off from her, I take it, with his head and shoulders out—so.

Well, we went and left them, sir. What else could we do? Ben Bumper was the first. Half-way over he cried out and dropped. What he did we never knew—whether he was struck, or slipped, or froze, or what it was. Some of the lads said it was for damning the old lady. But I don't know. All I know is he just cried out and dropped. Yes, we left 'em, him and the old lady, sitting side by side. I felt as mean as Lucifer. I called out good-by to him, and how mean I felt. But the blast blew his answer the other way. I saw his lips move, but I lost the words. I heard the old lady, though, as I swung off. You could have heard her in purgatory, if you'd been so far. She piped up like a weasel:

"My son's carrying me to Boston! He said it shouldn't cost me nothing"—

I heard her until I got ashore. Griggs didn't, himself. He was chilled or frozen, or something of that kind, and in a kind of faint, they said. I was mighty glad of it, I must say. The old creature did pipe up so! We stood on the rocks and watched them, well as we could see them through the beating of the blow. I had a feeling as if my eyes were beaten in my head. I put both hands up to hold 'em in. I saw Hancko trying to tie a life-preserver on to the old lady. The other boys didn't. But I did. He tried to tie it on, and she sat and wrung her hands. I don't suppose I heard her, but I'd have sworn I did, a-piping up:

*"He said it shouldn't cost me nothing!"*

Hancko stood up. I saw that. He stood looking straight ahead. I thought he had a grand look, being at a distance where you missed the squinting of his eye. And he stood so tall, sir, on that wreck, as tall as I stand to-day, which is six foot three in my stockings.

I suppose when a man's courting his wife he thinks more of such things quite natural; but I couldn't help thinking, when I saw Jib Hancko standing there, of that young woman down to Squam. If she'd been down to Calais visiting a cousin now, it would have seemed a pity. And I wondered if he thought of it, how he and the Pansie were going down together by themselves.

Next minute there come the awfulest, longest, horridest cry I ever listened to on land or sea. Whether it was the old lady as she struck water, or whether it was the skipper coming to and seeing the Pansie’s head-light out, or whether it was the devils below or the angels above, I couldn’t tell you to this day.

I don’t think you could understand, sir, unless you’d been through it yourself, what a feeling it gives a man to fall and slip, slip and fall, clutch and cling, and drop plumb down a wall of rock like that—all ice beneath you and about you—and squeeze your feet into a little ledge you know of, and jam your fingers into a little crack above your head, to save a human creature if so be it washes up against you, and see the lath and piles come thundering in. To see ’em rear and strike, and topple over, and splinter up like tea-cups, and suck under, and slip off. To hear the noise they made in hitting, and to mistake ’em for human legs and arms, and grab at them, and lose your balance, and duck your head as they come crashing up. Nor yet to dodge a bundle of lath carried shoulders over on one awful wave, and find you’d dodged a human body, sir, and it was banging up against the cliff like sea-weed, before your very eyes.

Well, I dodged him just that way; then I sprang on him, then I lost him; then I had him, I couldn’t tell you how—by the hair, by the leg, by the collar, all ways, no ways: he was very slippery. It was a very slippery feeling I had, what with him and the ice.

Yes. Oh! yes. They got us up. I wasn’t much hurt myself. I don’t know how it happened about Hancko. He lay such a dead weight, I suppose.

There was a hole there in the rock. You could see it if we were nigh enough. None too big for a man’s body. They had to pull him through. Twice they had him, and he slipped. He was awfully jammed.

Well, the Monday morning came at last. I had a feeling all the night as if the sun would never rise again. But Monday morning come like other Monday mornings, and folks hung out their washing all along the shore.

But it was the awfulest Monday morning, sir, that ever Gloucester knew. All the shore, from Pavilion Beach there to Norman’s Woe, was covered with wreck washed up like pebbles on the beach. All up and down the harbor ruins of boats lay rocking in the wind. Some went to shore as we did, and cracked on the rocks, dead weight; some got speared in the breakers; some drifted off to sea; many of ’em just went down at their anchors, with the lights of the town in their faces, or swamped before striking the rocks. Fifty craft went to pieces in that harbor, and fifty men went to the bottom before the blow was over.

The harbor lay a solid sheet of foam that day, from end to end. From its having such a white and shining look it made me think about the Sea of Glass we read of, sir.<sup>77</sup> I thought of it when I saw them drag the bodies up, and the poor fellows’ faces turned up on the snow. And I wondered if their ghosts were walking up and down the channel in the winter morning, playing harps. It seemed such freezing work. All along the coast, and in Boston Bay, and off Cape Cod, it was an awful blow. But Gloucester got the knuckles of it.

The old lady come ashore that morning. We hauled her up and carried her into a little shed there was about there, and covered her over with a bed-quilt before the skipper saw her.

We never found Ben Bumper.

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<sup>77</sup>Sea of Glass: from Revelation 15.2, “And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands.”

## Wrecked in Port

The mate come to about dawn; that is to say, as much as Jib Hancko will ever come to, this side of the place where the young woman from Squam has gone to (for which, if I'd been a pious man, I should have thanked the God of Sea and Shore). It wouldn't have been a pleasant job for her riding over in the wind four miles that morning, to see the cuts he had about the head, and the look.

You see the jam was all about the head. We warmed him up, and rubbed him up, and cheered him up, and Griggs paid the doctor seventy-five cents for feeling of his pulse; but it was no mortal use. He sat as crazy as a loon in the kitchen of the house we took him to, chattering about that old lady, and saying how he'd held on, until I wished for one he'd gone to the bottom with her himself. It seemed to me that would have been an arrangement much more agreeable to the young woman from Squam—if she has her preferences in her existing residence—than the present.

Not but what Griggs has paid his board quite regularly, and been to inquire about him at the asylum twice a year then and ever since. And he's peaceable, too, and very happy in his mind, they say, and spends his time in whittling little figure-heads for ships, with the name of Pansie underneath, in purple ink done with a fine steel pen.

We didn't mean him to get into that shed that morning, but he got in somehow; took us all by surprise, and at our wit's end for him.

It was a dreadfully bleak little open shed, and the old lady looked uncommonly cold, even considering the circumstances. Griggs was sitting by her with his hat jammed on his eyes. Two or three of us were about, standing in the door.

Hancko walks in with his head in its bandages, white and bloody, straight to Griggs.

"Well, Griggs," says he, "I held ont' the old lady."

"So you did, Jib," says Griggs, staring.

"I'm glad she looks so comfortable," says Jib, smiling round the shed. "But I think you'd better take her where it's a little warmer, cap'n, when she can be moved. I told you I'd hold on, Griggs!"

Folks say he sits saying that now, to this very day, "I held on, Cap'n Griggs! I told you I'd hold on!" over and over to himself, and always smiling round.

Sometimes, when I'm lying off here at the harbor's throat on a quiet day, I wonder whether it isn't better to *be* Jib Hancko—in a mad-house—holding on and smiling round, than it is to be me or you, sir, or the most of folks that I'm acquainted with. When I'm out here by myself, with the great sea calm below me, and the great sky still above me, I sometimes think it is, sir; I think it is with all my heart. But when I get home to my wife and sit down of an evening, I a'n't so sure, and so it goes.



## THE CHIEF OPERATOR

Except for the noise of the storm the exchange was noticeably quiet. For an hour calls had been few; when they came they tangled and overlapped as if from some general cause affecting particular cases. Men were occupied with facing the weather, or hurrying home from it. Many mothers had gone out with umbrellas and little coats to bring children back from school. There was a lull in the demands upon the wire, which for a small country exchange was rather a busy one.<sup>78</sup> Now and then a drop fell, or a young voice called, “Number?” and between whiles the girls chattered disjointedly as girls do when they have half a chance; or looked dismally out upon the rain, from the drowning windows. There were two girls, known as Molly and Mary, and the chief operator, held in respect by them not only for a certain power to enforce official authority, but because she was a married woman; and Molly and Mary were at the age when this circumstance appeared of more importance than it ever does before or after. The effect was depleted a little by the fact that Mrs. Raven was a widow; but she was quite a young widow, and still attractive—who could have said why? Of beauty she had little or none; but the eye remained upon and returned to her. The girls thought it was an “air” she had, the fit of a shirt-waist, the hang of a skirt, the way of braiding her bright hair below the head-receiver. An older or finer observer would have said, “It is her expression.”

This was self-possessed, but gentle; the old-fashioned word modest might have said it better than any of the newer feminine adjectives. There was a firm curve to her full, irregular lip which every operator knew and regarded, but her clear eyes, wide and warm, found it more natural to plead than to command. Her features, her gestures, her voice, appealed. She was without self-assertion. This, one would soon have determined, was not from deficiency in force, but from the acquisition of a quality which is the essence of force, although it may seem at first to be antagonistic to it. In some way, in some form, life had taught her to disregard herself. Even the girls perceived that their young chief was not uppermost in her own thoughts. They supposed it was because she was a widow.

It had rained continuously for three days and nights, and the river was swollen and perturbed. It was not a very broad river in its normal condition, but a deep one, and swung upon a powerful current. Now it had risen and looked unnaturally large; the banks at that point were low, and the exchange stood within a hundred feet of the water. This gave a cool, agreeable outlook, which the chief operator liked in summer, and at which she glanced gratefully whenever she could. It was August—the scorching August of 1908. She sat at her desk apart from her staff of two, beside the large, low window. The exchange stood by itself—a wooden building,

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<sup>78</sup> The story is set in an early county telephone exchange. Early in her career, Phelps wrote several essays—among them “What Shall They Do?”, *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 35 (Sept. 1867): 519-23—that advocated for women to work in even the most traditionally masculine of fields and professions. Beginning with the Boston Telephone Despatch in 1878, telephone operators were mostly single women, with men hired to be night operators at rural exchanges. Women were chosen because they had pleasant voices and could be underpaid. Whether or not Phelps had changed her mind about women’s careers is unclear, but this story supports social views regarding appropriate work for unmarried or widowed women. Phelps is correct in her description of an operator’s workload; while city operators handled up to 600 calls an hour, their rural counterparts were rarely busy.

## The Chief Operator

well put together; there was a small grocery-store upon the first floor; the telephone occupied the second story; the grocer was an old man, and sometimes walked a part of the way to protect Mrs. Raven when she went home to her stepmother's house, two miles down the desolate riverside, at half-past nine at night; after that no woman remained in the exchange, and the night operator came on duty.

The town had the wide spaces and uncertain comforts of the Territory.<sup>79</sup> The telephone was cherished accordingly. It was still treated like a miracle.

Sarah Raven sat at her desk and looked thoughtfully into the storm. It was toward the end of the month, and the great drought had broken, only to be renewed in a fiercer form after passing relief. Meanwhile the dark weather had something of the effect which the interruption of drought always has—finding one less grateful than one should be because one has become so accustomed to sunshine that its absence influences the spirits to the defiance of the season. Mrs. Raven was tired with the season's work, and something pale. She was a compact little figure of a woman; her black skirt and white waist with the black tie at her throat looked like a uniform or a habit upon her. She sat a trifle averted from the girls, the profile of her face and delicate bust against the long window set in a mist of rain and river. The head-receiver gave a Greek look to the American working-woman.

More than the sadness of storm was on her that afternoon, and as the day declined this increased. She attended listlessly to her duties when the girls called: "Number? What number?" and her eyes returned to the bloated river. What mattered a creeping tear if the river alone could see? This was August the 28<sup>th</sup>. To-morrow would be one of the anniversaries of which people who know life say that they are "days to be got over." To-morrow would be—From the pang of it she tried to forget, and then for the love of it she determined to remember, and then she dashed forgetting and remembering from her, and whirled upon her revolving-chair.

There was a sudden acceleration of demands upon the exchange. Calls came in from everywhere—most of them were impatient, and many irritable. Wives were summoning husbands, and husbands reassuring wives. "The storm is so bad—do get home! The house shakes, and the river frightens me. Hurry home, Harry; do!"—"Don't be anxious, Sue, if I am late to-night. It's pretty bad, and hard going. I'll get there sometime." Messages rained as hard as the storm. The drops upon the switchboard clattered fast.

"What number?" asked Molly.

"Chief operator?" called Mary.

"Chief operator," said Mrs. Raven, instantly.

The wind had mounted in the last half-hour and buffeted the exchange, which shook in the grip of it. The river ran angrily, and took on a frown as the early twilight of the storm descended. Between the three sounds—the threat of the water, the onset of the wind, and the complaining of the rain—it was hard to hear the slender cry of the wire. The girls had ceased to chatter, and listened sedulously.

The electric bulbs, staring with their indifferent eyes behind their softening shades, brightened as the room darkened; for an unnatural dusk had set in upon the place. The switchboard itself wore a curious look, almost an expression like that of a face—a consciousness; it had the air of power before which the girlish figures playing upon it were trivial

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<sup>79</sup> In 1908 there were two territories left in the continental United States, Arizona and New Mexico, both of which achieved statehood in 1912. They both had severe weather in the summer of 1908. This is one of the few stories Phelps sets outside New England.

and inefficient—the puppets of a mystery which might turn master when it appeared to be most slave. Somehow the rage of the river and the storm added to this impression; as if the elemental forces—water, wind and electricity—had combined into insurrection against human control.

If Mrs. Raven felt this, she had not time to think it; she had no time to think at all before there came quivering down the wire from her chief at headquarters, some fifteen miles up-stream, an order before which she stiffened into military attention. Now her voice rose like a thing that was trying to fly, and grew a trifle shrill; then it fell into the low, sustained telephone tones.

“What did you say? Please repeat. It is very noisy here. The storm . . . Please repeat, I say . . . more distinctly . . .

“ . . . *What?* I don’t get it all. Something ails your transmitter. . . . I can’t make it all out . . . only a few words. . . . *What?*”

She had begun to tremble now; her bright head, with its Greek head-piece like a fillet, shook, and her hands.<sup>80</sup> The operators at the switchboard had snatched at the sense of the message, and she could hear them crying out between disjointed fragments. Now the disability in the current—or perhaps it was the interference of the storm—had for the moment succumbed, and the call from headquarters, peremptory and clear as cut glass, came to her ears with the insistence of irrevocable catastrophe.

“The dam is going down. The river is breaking loose. Run for your lives! You have no time to spare. Notify anybody you can, but fly for your life! Do you hear me? Good-by.”

“I hear you perfectly,” said Sarah Raven. “I thank you for notifying me. Good-by.”

Her chair whirled, but she did not leave it.

“Girls—” she began. But the girls had already plucked the danger from the wire and had melted from the switchboard madly; they were flitting and screaming like the flock of birds swaying outside the window—little beings seeking shelter from fate, and fussily complaining of it.

“You can go, Molly and Mary,” said the chief operator, quietly. She put out her hand for her official directory.

“Mrs. Raven! Mrs. Raven!” cried Molly. “Why don’t you come, too?”

“Mrs. Raven!” called Mary. “*Dear Mrs. Raven!* Hurry! . . . Mrs. Raven, ain’t you coming with us?”

“No, I am not coming—not yet. Don’t talk to me, girls. I have my subscribers to think of first. Good-by girls.”

The girls dashed at her and kissed her and pleaded with her; but she repeated obstinately, “Good-by, girls,” and so they turned, sobbing childishly, thinking of themselves, as girls do, and started for the stairs. At the top of the long flight Mary looked back and cried out once more:

“*Dear Mrs. Raven!* . . . Don’t you want me to stay, too?” But Sarah Raven did not answer. It was doubtful if she heard. Her record of listed subscribers wavered in her hand, but her voice did not shake at all. As Mary went down the stairs she heard it echoing through the empty exchange.

“Is this 122, ring 2?”

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<sup>80</sup>Fillet: a head-band, ribbon, or string worn round the head, used for binding the hair, to keep the headdress in position, or simply for ornament.

## The Chief Operator

The young chief was calling her subscribers. She was about to warn them all—all who were in danger and had not been notified. There were forty of them in the lower valley. At the foot of the stairs, tumbling out pell-mell, the girls heard one authoritative order—their last—from the exchange above:

“Tell the grocer. Tell Mr. Rice. He’s old. He needs plenty of time.”

Sarah Raven left her desk and went to the deserted switchboard. She had removed her head-receiver to do so, and put on one belonging to the girls. She sat at her post with a composure which affected every muscle; if it did not reach the nerve, one watching her would not have known it. But there was no one to watch. She was not thinking of herself at all—not yet. She felt in some subterranean corridor of her being that the moment would come when she should; but she dismissed the idea as an interruption to her duty. To this she set herself with a passion that obliterated everything else gloriously; as passion does when it is high enough.

If anything that she did in that whirlwind of mind and heart could be called deliberate, she had deliberately chosen to call 122, ring 2, the first of all. It seemed to her that she had the right to so much—and the house was very near the water.

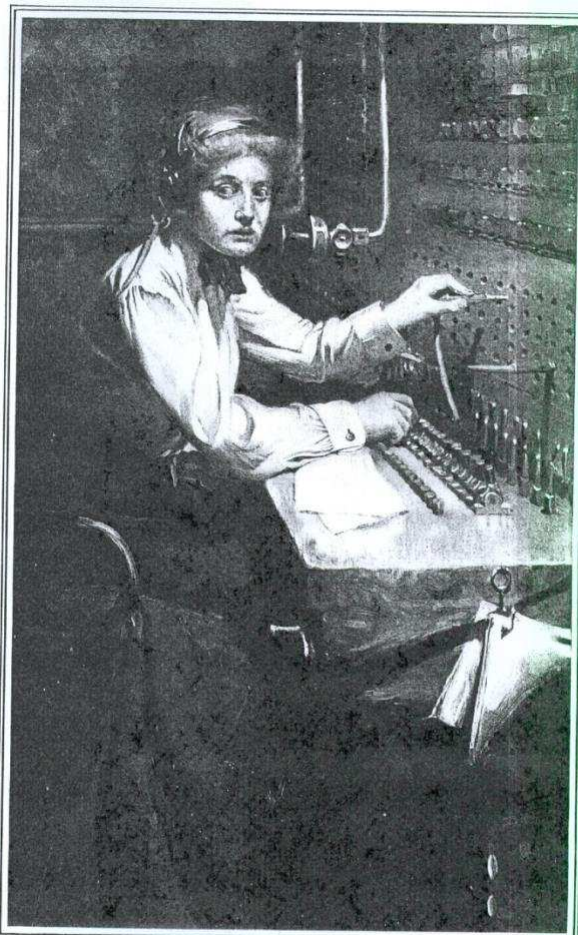
“For father’s sake,” she thought. “She was father’s wife. And she’s been a good stepmother to me.”

Flashing, and fading as soon as they had flashed, she saw the comfortable commonplace things that signified home to her—an orderly sitting-room with a hot Rochester burner on the centre-table; a red silk shade; a light-wood blaze sparkling on the hearth for her when she should drag herself in, drenched and tired; the table set for supper with willow ware in the dining-room beyond; a portly, kindly figure trundling in a blue cotton dress and white apron across the room to say: “Land! You must be frazzled out.” As the door swung back she could see her husband’s crayon portrait above the mantelpiece.

Her voice pierced the turmoil of water and wind with an astonishing self-possession:

“Mother! Run for your life! The dam is broken. Don’t wait for anything—run! . . . No, I can’t come yet . . . No, it doesn’t matter about me . . . not till I’ve warned my subscribers . . . Oh, I *must* take time to say . . . you’ve been a good mother to me . . . No, no, no, I *can’t* do it. Good-by.”

She was surprised to find, when she had rung off her stepmother’s agitated cries and entreaties, that she did not know for a wild moment what to do next; which of all the human homes dependent upon her to warn first. She perceived that they depended no more upon her



Drawn by F. E. Schommer

Half-tone plate engraved by W. H. Clark

SHE GLANCED OVER HER SHOULDER AT THE ADVANCING TERROR

heroism than upon her good sense, and yet that seemed to be the very quality which was deserting her. She sat drenched in a cold sweat of indecision, and for a few minutes she rang up her subscribers mechanically, by order of their number: 123 . . . 123, ring 1 . . . 124 . . . 125.

But she quickly collected herself and began to select from the unconscious families upon which the doom of the river was bearing down. With the swiftness of a sympathetic operator in a country exchange where she knew everybody and everybody knew her, she recalled the circumstances of her subscribers—who was sick, who was incompetent, who was hysterical, who had no man in the house.

She had rung up the daughter of a bed-ridden mother; they two lived alone at the bend of the stream where the flood must double upon itself and leave but half a chance, if any, even now; she was calling:

“128? Fanny! The river is rising. Run for the neighbors to lift her. You haven’t a minute. Run!”

She was still crying: “Fanny! Get the neighbors to lift her!” when the old grocer stumbled up the stairs and stood wheezing behind her. He had grasped her by the arm and shoulder.

“You get out o’ here!” he screamed.

She shook her head without a glance.

“I won’t have it. I tell you I won’t stand by and see it!” shouted the grocer. “You come along o’ me. There’s time ef you’re spry. Lord! Feel this damn building rock! You drop them there wires and get out o’ here, I say! . . . *Won’t*, hey? Well, Sarah Raven, I’ll jest set here till you will.”

The grocer sat down and looked at her obstinately; he was shrivelled with terror. The flood had yet a considerable distance to come; the dam was six or seven miles above the telephone headquarters in the country town; but the writhing valley helped the advance of the torrent, and it was impossible either then or after to time that terrible race.

The old grocer stamped up and down the room; he had begun to gibber.

“Mr. Rice,” said the operator, “this room is the property of the Southwestern Telephone Company, and I am their officer. I order you to leave the place. Oh, go!” she broke into a womanish cry, “there may be somebody—something—”

At this he went, as she had thought he would; she did not turn her head to see; she felt that she was alone with her duty. She glanced out of the long window. She saw foam and heard thunder. The stream, frenzied by rain, had already acquired a terrible breadth. It was not yet quite dark.

“It looks like the River of Death,” she thought. She did not look at it again. Her eyes, burned dry, smarted as if they had been fastened to her task with hot wax. The electric jets beneath their green shades winked and dimmed about her. The building quivered through every oaken sinew. A man might have been pardoned had he shaken with sheer physical terror. A soldier might have fled and been forgiven. The young woman sat at her post like a figure carved from the switchboard, a creature born of the thrill and power of modern life, whose opportunities replace the old brutal heroisms by as much as its ingenuities are finer. She rang to her task as truly as the call-bells, and clung to it as simply as the plugs and levers. She could easily have escaped from the building; there was still plenty of time; but it did not occur to her to do so.

Her mind worked swiftly now, and very clearly. Yet down the list of her subscribers her feeling ran ahead of her thought. Her instinct to save was quicker than electricity. It leaped

## The Chief Operator

before the current could, and melted with pity into forty homes. She set her white teeth and glanced over her shoulder at the advancing terror.

“You—you!” she defied it. “I’ll warn them all in spite of—you.”

Then she grew abject, and humbly entreated the river:

“Just give me time, won’t you? I need more time.”

There was a little boy down with scarlet fever at 116, ring 3. The house stood too near the bank. Oh, they all did, for that matter. It would be hard to get the little fellow out—and in the storm! There seemed to be as much water falling from above as there was rising from below. Her name? What *was* her name? Was the operator’s reason going with all the rest?

. . . “Mrs. Penney! Run for your life—and Johnny’s! The dam is broken. Wrap Johnny up in something—your water-proof. Leave everything else—only Johnny. Somebody will take him in. Oh, I am sure they will. You haven’t a minute. Good-by.”

. . . “Miss Gregory? Is that Maria Gregory? There’s a flood coming. Keep your head, Maria—you’re the only person in the house that has one—and get your mother and sister out. Good-by.”

. . . “Mr. Cole? That you, Mr. Cole? The dam is broken. Run for your lives! The nurse will help lift her—and the new baby—You have time if you’re quick. Good-by.”

. . . “Mary Brown! Mary Brown! The river is rising. Don’t stop for anything. Get out of the house with your father. Is he sober to-night? Can he walk? . . . Then *roll* him out. You’ll drown if you don’t. . . . Good-by.”

. . . “Mr. Henshaw? Mr. Henshaw, that you? There’s a flood coming. Run and intercept Jenny on her way from the office. Don’t go back home. Run!”

. . . “Helen Patterson? Helen Patterson! Isn’t this 126, ring 3? Mrs. Patterson?—126—ring 3? Helen Patterson?”

The call-bell at 126, ring 3, remained unanswered. The operator’s fingers flew along her plugs: 126, ring 4? But 126, ring 4, was silent, too.

“112? Is this 112? Aren’t you there, 112? Why don’t you answer me? I am Mrs. Raven. The dam is broken. Can’t you speak? 112? Can’t you *hear*?”

She rebuffed the truth from her as long as she could. She played upon the board bravely. She piled number upon number, selecting here and there, testing every wire on her map. She kept her head and her courage till this was done. Then for a moment her hands fell upon her lap, and her chin upon her breast.

But she collected herself quickly, and recalled with a dash of shame at her passing confusion that the up-stream wires still hung between herself and her headquarters. She rang up her manager, nervously now, without waiting for him to answer.

“I have to report that my lower wires are down. They are *all* down. I can’t notify my subscribers . . . any more. . . . I have done the best I could, sir. . . . I can’t do anything . . . more.”

She thought he tried to say, “Escape!” But if he replied at all, and she was not sure that he did, the word was cut off as if it had been slashed with a knife. At the same instant, suddenly and utterly the lights went out.

The operator’s voice trailed away into beaten silence, and she stared about her into the oscillating darkness. The wires to headquarters were disabled, too. The last strand that connected her with the living world had snapped. The electric fire, so long her servant, had betrayed her. Up to now she had comforted herself by the sense of contact with humankind, with the living voices in the human homes for the sake of which she had ceased to think of herself or her young life. So profound and so absorbing was her sense of solitude that at first it half

displaced from her consciousness what it signified to her. The ruin of the wires gave her the right to think of herself—to save herself.

She sprang, but the head-receiver—the signal of her official duty—held her. She removed it and went to the window. The floor, as she crossed it, swayed like a reeling bridge. She glanced at the river. It was an ocean of blackness, flogged by foam. She ran to the head of the stairs, but stopped to look out of the front window. She could swim—all the river girls could—and it suggested itself to her that, if the water were only quiet enough, she might yet make her way to land.

One look sufficed her. There was no longer any river; it had become a raving sea. The exchange stood, an island in a whirlpool. Perhaps it would continue to stand—it was a sturdy building. That was reasonable chance, she thought, and she clung to it sensibly.

She felt her way to her seat at her switchboard, and from long habit, perhaps, put on her head-receiver, or it might have been that she still cherished a hope that the trouble men would be able to do something and repair the trunk wire.

In the dark she began to grope for her plugs and drops, feeling for the numbers that she knew almost as well by sense of touch as by sense of sight. There might still be a chance to warn some helpless family—some foolish, incompetent woman, or disabled person. She reviewed her list of subscribers, name by name, asking whom she had omitted. It comforted her to believe that all the sick people had been told in time. She sat before her switchboard and thought of this.

Every one who has listened much to electric systems knows how impressive is their capacity for rhythmical sound. Wild weather strikes strange concords or discords from the local labyrinth. He could not have known the burden of his words who told us of “the music of the spheres” centuries before electricity was named or tamed.<sup>81</sup>

The operator with her metal fillet on her head hears nothing of this inchoate harmony; only the obedient hum or the rebellious roar of her working line. But as she walks home on bitter nights beneath the frosted wires, or lies hearing their thrilling cry upon the roof above her tired head, she listens with the acute sentience of her calling. She cannot deafen to the overmastering voices as another might. Her auditory nerves are never at rest. Sleep scarcely assuages them. She longs for silence which she may not find. If she be at all a sensitive woman, or especially if she be a music-loving one, she fancies curious harmonies or dissonances even in the monotonous and maddening buzz of the wire whose bond-slave she is. The world to her is never still; it is an autocracy of electric sound.

Sarah Raven had been, in a simple, country fashion, a musical girl, and she had been used to imagine sometimes that the current and the weather, united or apart, played accompaniments or struck melodies to the hymns and sacred songs by which the musical education of the village was chiefly bounded: little tinkling things that she had heard in churches and at weekly meetings—*Shall we gather at the river?* was one of them.<sup>82</sup> There was another that she used to like:

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<sup>81</sup>Music of the spheres: *musica universalis* is the ancient philosophy that regards proportions in the movements of celestial bodies as a form of music, with the time, the sun, moon, and planets revolving around Earth in their proper spheres. Pythagoras (circa 582-507 BC) is frequently credited with originating the concept, which can be found in Dante's *Divine Comedy* (1308-1321) and Johannes Kepler's *Harmonice Mundi* (1619).

<sup>82</sup> Phelps also references this hymn in “Doherty,” above.

## The Chief Operator

“Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood,  
Stand dressed in living green.”<sup>83</sup>

Now the wires were rent and snarled and flung—dashed and drowned in air and water. Yet—how was this?—the great choral seemed to her to sweep along outside the rocking building, as sounds that have actually ceased continue to repeat themselves to overstrained ears. As she sat at her post awaiting her fate—this was now a matter of moments, but her thoughts and sensations seemed to cover a long time—as she sat there, patient and grand, she remembered that she had meant to pray for herself as she had been taught in her religiously trained childhood. There had not been any time to think of that. Who, with forty human homes to warn, could stop for such a thing?

Plainly, it had been impossible. She wondered if God would blame her because she had forgotten her own soul.

Now, stealing upon the brutal uproar in whose central cell she was imprisoned, there came to her consciousness the strains of one of the great hymns by the power of which men have lived and died for more than a hundred and fifty years of human struggle.

Upon the wings of many waters she could hear this borne past the tottering building. It seemed to her as if it had stopped to take her up and sweep her on with it; as a phalanx of soldiers with their bugles and drums might gather up some defenseless creature in a riot, and so protect him.

“Jesus, Lover of my soul! . . .

While the billows near me roll,  
While the tempest still is high . . .

“Jesus, Lover of my soul! . . .  
Let me to Thy bosom fly.”<sup>84</sup>

The morning wore a wicked glitter. It showed a blazing, almost a blasting, sun, and there was no wind. But for the river it would have been a very quiet, cheerful day; one of the mornings when people hurry out-of-doors, laughing, and make up little picnics, and play with children, and smile at neighbors passing, and wish them good-day with cheery hearts.

But no one smiled that day throughout the valley. Tragic searching-parties followed the river’s new and fatal banks. Boats went down as soon as the torrent would hold them, and, swirling on snapping oars, hunted for signs of death or life. All the stalwart citizens offered themselves, and every man who could row or swim volunteered to leave no snag untouched, no eddy unexamined. A few persons floating on trees or roofs had been saved at dawn. More whom it was too late to save had been silently lifted and covered from sight. The old grocer ran to and fro calling shrilly.

“Where is Sarah Raven? Can’t anybody find Mrs. Raven? Mebbe she’s a livin’ woman somewheres yet.”

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<sup>83</sup> These lines are from Isaac Watts’s “Marching to Zion,” first printed in 1707.

<sup>84</sup> Charles Wesley wrote the lyrics his most famous hymn, “Jesus, Lover of my soul,” in 1740. Joseph Parry wrote its most often used melody in 1879.



“He tried to put out in a boat for her last night,” a compassionate neighbor said, “but he was oversot, and it’s kinder crazed him.”

Mary and Molly had followed the grocer, and stood childishly wringing their hands. For once in their little lives they did not talk. They felt ashamed to.

Midway of the morning there appeared a few men on horseback from the county town. These were the officials of the Southwestern Telephone Company—the manager, the superintendent of construction, and one or two subordinates. Their rigid faces wore the look of overwrought and sleepless men who are divided between grief and action. They were silent, as men are in such a case, but they worked with the more formidable determination for that.

Six miles—eight miles—ten miles down the stream, a horse and a foot and by spinning boats, the search went past the people. But the river vindictively refused to them their heroine.

It was hot, still noon when a man, wading waist-deep beneath a flooded orchard, called loudly for help, and twenty ran and dashed into the water at his side.

Twelve miles below her own exchange the young operator lay among the trees; so quietly, one might have said, from the smile of her so happily, that it seemed half a pity to

intrude upon her dream. Whatever it was, it had the sense of security that our dreams never know; and it would have been difficult to suppose, as one regarded her mercifully unmarred face, that she had ever suffered. A mud-bespattered wagon with a limping horse that had followed the search since daylight stopped opposite the mute, bareheaded group. A large woman climbed down—a woman in a drabbed blue cotton dress with a soaked white apron; she plodded laboriously through the mud at the orchard’s edge; she was sobbing without restraint.

“Gentlemen,” she said, “bein’ men-folks, I don’t know ’s you’ll feel to care so much to know it, but if she’d been my own—I never knew she warn’t—and, gentlemen, it is the 29<sup>th</sup> of August—and that’s her wedding-day.”

The manager of the Telephone Company, her chief from the upper town, rode splashing through the water and stood uncovered before Sarah Raven.

“She saved a good many,” he said, speaking with difficulty. “She’s got that comfort. It’s more than most of us will ever get in this world. As nearly as we can



tell, there are fifty persons alive to-day that—if it hadn’t been for *her* . . .”

He could not finish what he was saying, but the old grocer, half crazed, fell upon his knees in the water.

## The Chief Operator

“Lord,” he cried, “forgive us our trespasses! Question is whether we’re *wuth* it, Lord!”

Now it was seen that the manager had asked leave to help carry her through the flooded trees. He looked down upon her proudly as he waded at her side.

“For the honor of the company,” he thought.

But her stepmother babbled as she sobbed:

“She’d oughter been buried in her wedding-dress. But it’s gone—with everything else. She ain’t even a home to her dear body to be laid out in.”

“Every home left standing is hers to-day, madam,” the chief answered, with emotion.

“But that is the company’s privilege. She is not yours any longer, madam; she is ours. No, she is not ours—she is the world’s.”

He stooped and touched her with a solemn reverence. The head-receiver, with its Greek look, was still fastened upon her bright hair. When some one would have removed it, the chief refused.

“We will not disturb that crown,” he said.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### “SUSPECTING A SPIRITUALISTIC MEDIUM”: WRITING SPIRITUALISM

What Did She See With?  
The Day of My Death  
Since I Died  
Told in Trust

## INTRODUCTION

In 1848, Margaret and Kate Fox, a pair of sisters from Rochester, New York, claimed they were able to communicate with the spirit world through a series of sharp raps or knocks. Although they were later proved to be a hoax, the so-called “Rochester rappings” instigated wide interest in spirit communication that spread rapidly through the United States, to England and beyond. Spiritualism is the term used to cover the complicated and variant system of beliefs and practices built around conviction in the possibility of communication and interaction between the spirit world and the material world. What started as a local and private matter became an international movement with increasingly sophisticated beliefs and methods. Simple rappings evolved into practices such as spirit-writing, trance-speaking, mesmerism, the use of mediums at séances, and encounters with ghosts, malevolent and benign.

In the first wake of the Rochester phenomena, for several months in 1850, a Connecticut minister’s home and family became the center of nationwide attention as “mysterious noises” and “unearthly doings” frightened and astounded the people of Stratford. This minister, Reverend Dr. Eliakim Phelps, was Elizabeth Stuart Phelps’s paternal grandfather. Early in her memoirs, she describes him as “an orthodox minister of ability and originality, and with a vivacious personal history,” who was a profound influence on her, particularly on her Christian reform work (*Chapters 6*). His Connecticut poltergeist was well documented in the newspapers of the day, but Phelps heard the story firsthand in her formative years:

From his own lips, too, I heard the accounts of that extraordinary case of house-possession of which . . . this innocent and unimaginative country minister, who had no more faith in his “spooks” than he had in Universalists, was made the astonished victim. Night upon night I have crept gasping to bed, and shivered for hours with my head under the clothes, after an evening spent in listening to this authentic and fantastic family tale. How the candlesticks walked out into the air from the mantelpiece and back again; how the chairs of skeptical visitors collected from all parts of the country to study what one had hardly then begun to call the “phenomena” at the parsonage at Stratford, Connecticut, hopped after the guests when they crossed the room; how the dishes at the table leaped, and the silver forks were bent by unseen hands, and cold turnips dropped from the solid ceiling; and ghastly images were found, composed of underclothing proved to have been locked at the time in the drawers of which the only key lay all the while in Dr. Phelps’s pocket; and how the mysterious agencies, purporting by alphabetical raps upon bed-head or on table to be in torments of the nether world, being asked what their host could do to relieve them, demanded a piece of squash pie. (*Chapters 6*)

Many of the manifestations experienced by her grandfather made it into the stories included here. An important portion of Phelps’s fiction draws from the practices and beliefs of spiritualism, including her best-selling novel, *The Gates Ajar* (1868), and its sequels, *Beyond the Gates* (1883), and *The Gates Between* (1887). She wrote numerous stories that involved spiritualist phenomena, and she collected some of these stories in her first anthology, *Men, Women, and Ghosts* (1869). However, Phelps repeatedly noted that she was not a spiritualist, and she wryly discussed her personal lack of spirit contact: “no inexplicable facts have honored my experience,” no walking chairs or falling turnips, though a medium “once made a whole winter miserable by prophesying a death which did not occur. . . . The only personal prophecy ever

strictly fulfilled in my life was made by a gypsy fortune-teller,” but she coyly excused herself from relating the prophecy (*Chapters* 9).

Phelps’s readers might then wonder why spiritualism mattered to her and why she featured it in so many of her narratives, including the stories that follow. Studies of transatlantic spiritualism show that while the practice often functioned as a site of contention between the competing claims of science and religion, it also contributed to increased rights and freedoms for women. Bridget Bennett notes its “profound political implications, explicitly in relation to women’s rights and abolition but also in terms of reshaping attitudes to the domestic” (151). Alex Owen reads the histories of female mediums to show how spiritualism functioned as a social movement particularly invested in gender and other equalities. Although by her own proclamation not a spiritualist, Phelps drew on spiritualism and its phenomena for dual purposes: on the one hand, she engaged with the trappings and practices of spiritualism, not as competing religious discourse but as a social movement, for most of her long career. On the other hand, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps found, as do writers and readers today, that ghosts make for riveting stories. The stories that follow point out social ills true, but they also engage and entertain their readers with both humorous and suspenseful tales of the supernatural. They offer up vengeful spirits alongside ghosts who want nothing more than a piece of squash pie.

## THE STORIES

“What Was the Matter?” was also collected in *Men, Women, and Ghosts*, but first appeared as “What Did She See With?” in the *Atlantic Monthly* (Aug. 1866: 146-58).

“The Day of My Death” first appeared in *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* (October 1868: 621-32), and then in *Men, Women, and Ghosts* (Boston: Fields, Osgood, 1869: 113-60). Phelps appended the following note to both: “The characters in this narrative are fictitious. The author does not profess to have witnessed the incidents recorded in it. But they are given as related by eye-witnesses whose testimony would command a verdict from any honest jury. The author, however, draws no conclusions and suggests none.”

“Since I Died” was first published in *Scribner’s* (Feb. 1873: 440-52) and then collected in Phelps’s anthology of short fiction, *Sealed Orders* (Boston: Houghton, Osgood, 1879: 168-75).

“Told in Trust” was published in *Harper’s Bazaar* (5 May 1900: 9-17).

## WHAT WAS THE MATTER?, OR, WHAT DID SHE SEE WITH?

I could not have been more than seven or eight years old, when it happened; but it might have been yesterday. Among all other childish memories, it stands alone. To this very day it brings with it the old, utter sinking of the heart, and the old, dull sense of mystery.

To read the story, you should have known my mother. To understand it, you should understand her. But that is quite impossible now, for there is a quiet spot over the hill, and past the church, and beside the little brook where the crimsoned mosses grow thick and wet and cool, from which I cannot call her. It is all I have left of her now. But after all, it is not of her that you will chiefly care to hear. The object of my story is simply to acquaint you with a few facts, which, though interwoven with the events of her life, are quite independent of it as objects of interest. It is, I know, only my own heart that makes these pages a memorial,—but, you see, I cannot help it.

Yet, I confess, no glamour of any earthly love has ever entirely dazzled me,—not even hers. Of imperfections, of mistakes, of sins, I knew she was guilty. I know it now,—even with the sanctity of those crimsoned mosses, and the hush of the rest beneath, so close to my heart, I cannot forget them. Yet somehow—I do not know how—the imperfections, the mistakes, the very sins, bring her nearer to me as the years slip by, and make her dearer.

The key to her life is the key to my story. That given, as I can give it, I will try to compress. It lies in the fact that my mother was what we call an aristocrat. I do not like the term, as the term is used. I am sure she does not now; but I have no other word. She was a royal-looking woman, and she had the blood of princes in her veins. Generations back—how we children used to reckon the thing over!—she was cradled in a throne. A miserable race, to be sure, they were,—the Stuarts; and the most devout genealogist might deem it dubious honor to own them for great-grandfathers by innumerable degrees removed. So she used to tell us, over and over, as a damper on our childish vanity, looking such a very queen as she spoke, in every play of feature, and every motion of her hand, that it was the old story of preachers who did not practise. The very baby was proud of her. The beauty of a face, and the elegant repose of a manner, are by no means influences more unfelt at three years than at thirty.

As insanity will hide itself away, and lie sleeping, and die out,—while old men are gathered to their fathers scathless, and young men follow in their footsteps safe and free,—and start into life, and claim its own when children's children have forgotten it; as a single trait of a single scholar in a race of clods will bury itself in day-laborers and criminals, unto the third and fourth generation, and spring then, like a creation from a chaos, into statesmen and poets and sculptors;—so, I have sometimes fancied, the better and truer nature of voluptuaries and tyrants was sifted down through the years, and purified in our little New England home, and the essential autocracy of monarchical blood refined and ennobled in my mother into royalty.

A broad and liberal culture had moulded her; she knew its worth, in every fibre of her heart; scholarly parents had blessed her with their legacies of scholarly mind and name. With the soul of an artist, she quivered under every grace and every defect; and the blessing of a beauty as rare as rich had been given to her. With every instinct of her nature recoiling from the very shadow of crimes the world winks at, as from a loathsome reptile, the family record had been stainless for a generation. God had indeed blessed her; but the very blessing was a temptation.

I knew, before she left me, what she might have been, but for the merciful and tender watch of Him who was despised and rejected of men. I know, for she told me, one still night

when we were alone together, how she sometimes shuddered at herself, and what those daily and hourly struggles between her nature and her Christianity *meant*.

I think we were as near to one another as mother and daughter can be; but yet as utterly different. Since I have been talking in such lordly style of those miserable Jameses and Charleses, I will take the opportunity to confess that I have inherited my father’s thorough-going democracy,—double measure, pressed down and running over. She not only pardoned it, but I think she loved it in me, for his sake.

It was about a year and a half, I think, after he died, that she sent for Aunt Alice to come to Creston. “Your aunt loves me,” she said, when she told us in her quiet way, “and I am so lonely now.”

They had been the only children, and they loved each other,—how much, I afterwards knew. And how much they love each other *now*, I like to think,—quite freely and fully, and without shadow or doubt between them, I dare to hope.

A picture of Aunt Alice always hung in mother’s room. It was taken down years ago. I never asked her where she put it. I remember it, though, quite well; for mother’s sake I am glad I do. For it was a pleasant face to look upon, and a young, pure, happy face,—beautiful too, though with none of the regal beauty crowned by my mother’s massive hair, and pencilled brows. It was a timid, girlish face, with reverent eyes, and ripe, tremulous lips,—weak lips, as I remember them. From babyhood, I felt a want in the face. I had, of course, no capacity to define it; it was represented to me only by the fact that it differed from my mother’s.

She was teaching school out West when mother sent for her. I saw the letter. It was just like my mother:—“Alice, I need you. You and I ought to have but one home now. Will you come?”

I saw, too, a bit of postscript to the answer,—“I’m not fit that you should love me so, Marie.”

And how mother laughed at it!

When it was all settled, and the waiting weeks became at last a single day, I hardly knew my mother. She was in her early married years; she was a girl; she was every young thing, and merry thing, that she could have ever been. So full of fitful moods, and little fantastic jokes! such a flush on her cheeks too, as she ran to the window every five minutes, like a child! I remember how we went all over the house together, she and I, to see that everything looked neat, and bright, and welcome. And how we lingered in the guest-room, to put the little finishing touches to its stillness, and coolness, and cozyness. The best spread on the bed, and the white folds smoothed as only mother’s fingers could smooth them; the curtain freshly washed, and looped with its crimson cord; the blinds drawn, cool and green; the late afternoon sunlight slanting thorough, in flecks upon the floor. Flowers, too, upon the table. I remember they were all white,—lilies of the valley, I think; and the vase of Parian marble, itself a solitary lily, unfolding stainless leaves. Over the mantle she had hung the finest picture in the house,—an “Ecce Homo,” and an exquisite engraving. It used to hang in grandmother’s room in the old house. We children wondered a little that she took it up stairs.

“I want your aunt to feel at home, and see home things,” she said. “I wish I could think of something more to make it pleasant in here.”

Just as we left the room she turned and looked into it. “Pleasant, is n’t it? I am so glad, Sarah,” her eyes dimming a little. “She’s a very dear sister to me.”

## What Was the Matter?

She stepped in again to raise a stem of the lilies that had fallen from the vase, and lay like wax upon the table, then she shut the door and came away.

That door was shut just so for years; the lonely bars of sunlight flecked the solitude of the room, and the lilies faded on the table. We children passed it with hushed footfall, and shrank from it at twilight, as from a room that held the dead. But into it we never went.

Mother was tired out that afternoon; for she had been on her feet all day, busied in her loving cares to make our simple home as pleasant and as welcome as home could be. But yet she stopped to dress us in our Sunday clothes,—and no sinecure was it to dress three persistently undressable children; Winthrop was a host in himself. “Auntie must see us look our prettiest,” she said.

She was a picture herself when she came down. She had taken off her widow’s cap and coiled her heavy hair low in her neck, and she always looked like a queen in that lustreless black silk. I do not know why these little things should have made such an impression on me then. They are priceless to me now. I remember how she looked, framed there in the doorway, while we were watching for the coach,—the late light ebbing in golden tides over the grass at her feet, and touching her face now and then through the branches of trees, her head bent a little, with eager, parted lips, and the girlish color on her cheeks, her hand shading her eyes as they strained for a sight of the lumbering coach. She must have been a magnificent woman when she was young,—not unlike, I have heard it said, to that far-off ancestress whose name she bore, and whose sorrowful story has made her sorrowful beauty immortal. Somewhere abroad there is a reclining statue of Queen Mary, to which, when my mother stood beside it, her resemblance was so strong that the by-standers clustered about her, whispering curiously. “Ah, mon Dieu!” said a little Frenchman, aloud, “c’est une résurrection.”

We must have tried her that afternoon, Clara and Winthrop and I; for the spirit of her own excitement had made us completely wild. Winthrop’s scream of delight when, stationed on the gate-post, he caught the first sight of the old yellow coach, might have been heard a quarter of a mile.

“Coming?” said mother, nervously, and stepped out to the gate, full in the sunlight that crowned her like royal gold.

The coach lumbered on, and rattled up, and passed.

“Why, she has n’t come!” All the eager color died out of her face. “I am so disappointed!” speaking like a troubled child, and turning slowly into the house.

Then, after a while, she drew me aside from the others,—I was the oldest, and she was used to make a sort of confidence between us, instinctively, as it seemed, and often quite forgetting how very few my years were. “Sarah, I don’t understand. You think she might have lost the train? But Alice is so punctual. Alice never lost a train. And she said she would come.” And then, a while after, “I *don’t* understand.”

It was not like my mother to worry. The next day the coach lumbered up and rattled past, and did not stop,—and the next, and the next.

“We shall have a letter,” mother said, her eyes saddening every afternoon. But we had no letter. And another day went by, and another.

“She is sick,” we said; and mother wrote to her, and watched for the lumbering coach, and grew silent day by day. But to the letter there was no answer.

Ten days passed. Mother came to me one afternoon to ask for her pen, which I had borrowed. Something in her face troubled me vaguely.



“What are you going to do, mother?”

“Write to your aunt’s boarding-place. I can’t bear this any longer,” sharply. She had already grown unlike herself.

She wrote, and asked for an answer by return of mail.

It was on Wednesday, I remember, that we looked for it. I remember everything that happened that day. I came home early from school. Mother was sewing at the parlor window, her eyes wandering from her work, up the road. It was an ugly day. It had rained drearily from eight o’clock till two, and closed in suffocating mist, creeping and dense and chill. It gave me a childish fancy of long-closed tombs and lowland graveyards, as I walked home in it.

I tried to keep the younger children quiet when we went in, mother was so nervous. As the early, uncanny twilight fell, we grouped around her timidly. A dull sense of awe and mystery clung to the night, and clung to her watching face, and clung even then to that closed room upstairs where the lilies were fading.

Mother sat leaning her head upon her hand, the outline of her face dim in the dusk against the falling curtain. She was sitting so when we heard the first rumble of the distant coach-wheels. At the sound, she folded her hands in her lap and stirred a little, rose slowly from her chair, and sat down again.

“Sarah.”

I crept up to her. At the near sight of her face, I was so frightened I could have cried.

“Sarah, you may go out and get the letter. I—I can’t.”

I went slowly out at the door and down the walk. At the gate I looked back. The outline of her face was there against the window-pane, white in the gathering gloom.

It seems to me that my older and less sensitive years have never known such a night. The world was stifling in a deluge of gray, cold mists, unstirred by a breath of air. A robin with feathers all ruffled, and head hidden, sat on the gate-post, and chirped a little mournful chirp, like a creature dying in a vacuum. The very daisy that nodded and drooped in the grass at my feet seemed to be gasping for breath. The neighbor’s house, not forty paces across the street, was invisible. I remember the sensation it gave me, as I struggled to find its outlines, of a world washed out, like the figures I washed out on my slate. As I trudged, half frightened, into the road, and the fog closed about me, it seemed to my childish superstition like a horde of long-imprisoned ghosts let loose and angry. The distant sound of the coach, which I could not see, added to the fancy.

The coach turned the corner presently. On a clear day I could see the brass buttons on the driver’s coat at that distance. There was nothing visible now of the whole dark structure but the two lamps in front, like the eyes of some evil thing, glaring and defiant, borne with swift motion down upon me by a power utterly unseen,—it had a curious effect. Even at this time, I confess I do not like to see a lighted carriage driven through a fog.

I summoned all my little courage, and piped out the driver’s name, standing there in the road.

He reined up his horses with a shout,—he had nearly driven over me. After some searching, he discovered the small object cowering down in the mist, handed me a letter, with a muttered oath at being intercepted on such a night, and lumbered on and out of sight in three rods.

I went slowly into the house. Mother had lighted a lamp, and stood at the parlor door. She did not come into the hall to meet me.

## What Was the Matter?

She took the letter and went to the light, holding it with the seal unbroken. She might have stood so two minutes.

“Why don’t you read, mamma?” spoke up Winthrop. I hushed him.

She opened it then, read it, laid it down upon the table, and went out of the room without a word. I had not seen her face. We heard her go upstairs and shut the door.

She had left the letter open there before us. After a little awed silence, Clara broke out into sobs. I went up and read the few and simple lines.

*Aunt Alice had left for Creston on the appointed day.*

Mother spent that night in the closed room where the lilies had drooped and died. Clara and I heard her pacing the floor till we cried ourselves to sleep. When we woke in the morning, she was pacing it still.

Well, weeks wore into months, and the months became many years. More than that we never knew. Some inquiry revealed the fact, after a while, that a slight accident had occurred upon the Erie Railroad to the train which she should have taken. There was some disabling, but no deaths, the conductor had supposed. The car had fallen into the water. She might not have been missed when the half-drowned passengers were all drawn out.

So mother added a little crape to her widow’s weeds, the key of the closed room lay henceforth in her drawer, and all things went on as before.<sup>85</sup> To her children my mother was never gloomy,—it was not her way. No shadow of household affliction was placed like a skeleton confronting our uncomprehending joy. Of what those weeks and months and years were to her,—a widow, and quite uncomforted in their dark places by any human love,—she gave no sign. We thought her a shade paler, perhaps. We found her often alone with her little Bible. Sometimes, on the Sabbath, we missed her, and knew that she had gone into that closed room. But she was just as tender with us in our little faults and sorrows, as merry with us in our plays, as eager in our gayest plans, as she had always been. As she had always been,—our mother.

And so the years slipped by, to her and to us. Winthrop went into business in Boston; he never took to his books, and mother was too wise to *push* him through college; but I think she was disappointed. He was her only boy, and she would have chosen for him the profession of his father and grandfather. Clara and I graduated in our white dresses and blue ribbons, like other girls, and came home to mother, crochet-work, and Tennyson. And then something happened, as the veriest little things—which, unnoticed and uncomprehended, hold the destinies of lives in their control—will happen.

I mean that our old and long-trying cook, Bathsheba, who had been an heirloom in the family, suddenly fell in love with the older sexton, who had rung the passing-bell for every soul who died in the village for forty years, and took it into her head to marry him, and desert our kitchen for his little brown house under the hill.

So it came about that we hunted the township for a handmaiden; and it also came about that our inquiring steps led us to the poor-house. A stout, not over-brilliant-looking girl, about twelve years of age, was to be had for her board and clothes, and such schooling as we could

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<sup>85</sup> Crape, or crêpe, is a stiff, crinkled silk fabric, often dyed black and used in mourning dress, or widow’s weeds, an area of fashion thoroughly proscribed by social norms through the nineteenth century. Style, materials, and color, which progressed from black to other somber shades, were dictated by social trends.

give her,—in country fashion, to be “bound out” till she should be eighteen. The economy of the arrangement decided in her favor; for, in spite of our grand descent and grander notions, we were poor enough, after father died, and the education of three children had made no small gap in our little principal, and she came.

Her name was a singular one,—Selphar. It always savored too nearly of brimstone to please me.<sup>86</sup> I used to call her Sel, “for short.” She was a good, sensible, uninteresting-looking girl, with broad face, large features, and limp, tow-colored curls. They used to hang straight down about her eyes, and were never otherwise than perfectly smooth. She proved to be of good temper, which is worth quite as much as brains in a servant, as honest as the daylight, dull enough at her books, but a good, plodding worker, if you marked out every step of the way for her beforehand. I do not think she would ever have discovered the laws of gravitation; but she might have jumped off a precipice to prove them, if she had been bidden.

Until she was seventeen, she was precisely like any other rather stupid girl; never given to novel-reading or fancies; never frightened by the dark or ghost-stories; proving herself warmly attached to us, after a while, and rousing in us, in return, the kindly interest naturally felt for a faithful servant; but she was not in any respect *uncommon*,—quite far from it,—except in the circumstance that she never told a falsehood.

At seventeen she had a violent attack of diphtheria, and her life hung by a thread. Mother’s aristocracy had nothing of that false pride which is afraid of contamination from kindly association with its inferiors. She was too thoroughly a lady. She was as tender and unwearying in her care of Selphar as the girl’s own mother might have been. She was somehow touched by the child’s orphaned life,—suffering always, in all places, appealed to her so strongly,—every sorrow found so warm a place in her heart.

From that time, I believe Sel was immovable in her faith in my mother’s divinity. Under such nursing as she had, she slowly recovered, but her old, stolid strength never came back to her. Severe headaches became of frequent occurrence. Her stout, muscular arms grew weak. As weeks went on, it became evident in many ways that, though the diphtheria itself was quite out of her system, it had left her thoroughly diseased. Strange fits of silence came over her: her volubility had been the greatest objection we had to her hitherto. Her face began to wear a troubled look. She was often found in places where she had stolen away to be alone.

One morning she slept late in her little garret-chamber, and we did not call her. The girl had gone upstairs the night before crying with the pain in her temples, and mother, who was always thoughtful of her servants, said it was a pity to wake her, and, as there were only three of us, we might get our own breakfast for once. While we were at work together in the kitchen, Clara heard her kitten mewing out in the snow, and went to the door to let her in. The creature, possessed by some sudden frolic, darted away behind the well-curb. Clara was always a bit of a romp, and, with never a thought of her daintily-slippered feet, she flung her trailing dress over one arm and was off over the three-inch snow. The cat led her a brisk chase, and she came in flushed, and panting, and pretty, her little feet drenched, and the tip of a Maltese tail just visible above a great bundle she had made of her apron.

“Why!” said mother, “you have lost your ear-ring.”

Clara dropped the kitten with unceremonious haste on the floor, felt of her little pink ear, shook her apron, and the corners of her mouth went down into her dimpled chin.

“They’re the ones Winthrop sent, of all things in the world!”

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<sup>86</sup> Brimstone is another term for the chemical element sulfur.

## What Was the Matter?

“You’d better put on your rubbers, and have a hunt out-doors,” said mother.

We hunted out-doors,—on the steps, on the well-boards, in the wood-shed, in the snow; Clara looked down the well till her nose and fingers were blue, but the ear-ring was not to be found. We hunted in-doors, under the stove, and the chairs, and the table, in every possible and impossible nook, cranny, and crevice, but gave up the search in despair. It was a pretty trinket,—a leaf of delicately wrought gold, with a pearl dew-drop on it,—very becoming to Clara, and the first present Winthrop had sent her from his earnings. If she had been a little younger she would have cried. She came very near it as it was, I suspect, for when she went after the plates she stayed in the cupboard long enough to set two tables.

When we were half through breakfast, Selphar came down, blushing, and frightened half out of her wits, her apologies tumbling over each other with such skill as to render each one unintelligible,—and evidently undecided in her own mind whether she was to be hung or burnt at the stake.

“It’s no matter at all,” said mother, kindly; “I knew you felt sick last night. I should have called you if I had needed you.”

Having set the girl at her ease, as only she could do, she went on with her breakfast, and we forgot all about her. She stayed, however, in the room to wait on the table. It was afterwards remembered that she had not been out of our sight since she came down the garret-stairs. Also, that her room looked out upon the opposite side of the house from that on which the well-curb stood.

“Why, look at Sel!” said Clara, suddenly, “she has her eyes shut.”

The girl was just passing the toast. Mother spoke to her. “Selphar, what is the matter?”

“I don’t know.”

“Why don’t you open your eyes?”

“I can’t.”

“Hand the salt to Miss Sarah.”

She took it up and brought it around the table to me, with perfect precision.

“Sel, how you act!” said Clara, petulantly. “Of course you saw.”

“Yes ’m, I saw,” said the girl in a puzzled way, “but my eyes are shut, Miss Clara.”

“Tight?”

“Tight.”

Whatever this freak meant, we thought best to take no notice of it. My mother told her, somewhat gravely, that she might sit down until she was wanted, and we returned to our conversation about the ear-ring.

“Why!” said Sel, with a little jump, “I see your ear-ring, Miss Clara,—the one with a white drop on the leaf. It’s out by the well.”

The girl was sitting with her back to the window, her eyes, to all appearance, tightly closed.

“It’s on the right-hand side, under the snow, between the well and the wood-pile. Why, don’t you see?”

Clara began to look frightened, mother displeased.

“Selphar,” she said, “this is nonsense. It is impossible for you to see through the walls of two rooms and a wood-shed.”

“May I go and get it?” said the girl, quietly.

“Sel,” said Clara, “on your word and honor, are your eyes shut *perfectly* tight?”

“If they ain’t, Miss Clara, then they never was.”

Sel never told a lie. We looked at each other, and let her go. I followed her out, and kept my eyes on her closed lids. She did not once raise them; nor did they tremble, as lids will tremble, if only partially closed.

She walked without the slightest hesitation directly to the well-curb, to the spot which she had mentioned, stooped down, and brushed away the three-inch fall of snow. The ear-ring lay there, where it had sunk in falling. She picked it up, carried it in, and gave it to Clara.

That Clara had the thing on when she started after her kitten, there could be no doubt. She and I both remembered it. That Sel, asleep on the opposite side of the house, could not have seen it drop, was also settled. That she, with her eyes closed and her back to the window, had seen through three walls, and through three inches of snow, at a distance of fifty feet, was an inference.

“I don’t believe it!” said my mother, “it’s some nonsensical mistake.” Clara looked a little pale, and I laughed.

We watched her carefully through the day. Her eyes remained tightly closed. She understood all that was said to her, answered correctly, but did not seem inclined to talk. She went about her work as usual, and performed it without a mistake. It could not be seen that she groped at all with her hands to feel her way, as is the case with the blind. On the contrary, she touched everything with her usual decision. It was impossible to believe, without seeing them, that her eyes were closed.

We tied a handkerchief tightly over them; see through it or below it she could not, if she had tried. We then sent her into the parlor, with orders to bring from the book-case two Bibles which had been given as prizes to Clara and me at school, when we were children. The books were of precisely the same size, color, and texture. Our names in gilt letters were printed upon the binding. We followed her in, and watched her narrowly. She went directly to the book-case, laid her hands upon the books at once, and brought them to my mother. Mother changed them from hand to hand several times, and turned them with the gilt lettering downwards upon her lap.

“Now, Selphar, which is Miss Sarah’s?”

The girl quietly took mine up. The experiment was repeated and varied again and again. In every case the result was the same. She made no mistake. It was no guess-work. All this was done with the bandage tightly drawn about her eyes. *She did not see those letters with them.*

That evening we were sitting quietly in the dining-room. Selphar sat a little apart with her sewing, her eyes still closed. We kept her with us, and kept her in sight. The parlor, which was a long room, was between us and the front of the house. The distance was so great that we had often thought, if prowlers were to come around at night, how impossible it would be to hear them. The curtains and shutters were closely drawn. Sel was sitting by the fire. Suddenly she turned pale, dropped her sewing, and sprang from her chair.

“Robbers, robbers!” she cried. “Don’t you see? they’re getting in the east parlor window! There’s three of ’em, and a lantern. They’ve just opened the window,—hurry, hurry!”

“I believe the girl is insane,” said mother, decidedly. Nevertheless, she put out the light, opened the parlor door noiselessly, and went in.

The east window was open. There was a quick vision of three men and a dark lantern. Then Clara screamed, and it disappeared. We went to the window, and saw the men running down the street. The snow the next morning was found trodden down under the window, and their footprints were traced out to the road.

When we went back to the other room, Selphar was standing in the middle of it, a puzzled, frightened look on her face, her eyes wide open.

## What Was the Matter?

“Selphar,” said my mother, a little suspiciously, “how did you know the robbers were there?”

“Robbers!” said the girl, aghast.

She knew nothing of the robbers. She knew nothing of the ear-ring. She remembered nothing that had happened since she went up the garret-stairs to bed, the night before. And, as I said, the girl was as honest as the sunlight. When we told her what had happened, she burst into terrified tears.

For some time after this there was no return of the “tantrums,” as Selphar had called the condition, whatever it was. I began to get up vague theories of a trance state. But mother said, “Nonsense!” and Clara was too much frightened to reason at all about the matter.

One Sunday morning Sel complained of a headache. There was an evening service that night, and we all went to church. Mother let Sel take the empty seat in the carryall beside her.

It was very dark when we started to come home. But Creston was a safe old Orthodox town, the roads were filled with returning church-goers like ourselves, and mother drove like a man. A darker night I think I have never seen. Literally, we could not see a hand before our eyes. We met a carriage on a narrow road, and the horses’ heads touched, before either driver had seen the other.

Selphar had been quite silent during the drive. I leaned forward, looked closely into her face, and could dimly see through the darkness that her eyes were closed.

“Why!” she said at last, “see those gloves!”

“Where?”

“Down in the ditch; we passed them before I spoke. I see them on a blackberry-bush; they’ve got little brass buttons on the wrist.”

Three rods past now, and we could not see our horse’s head.

“Selphar,” said my mother, quickly, “what *is* the matter with you?”

“If you please, ma’am, I don’t know,” replied the girl, hanging her head. “May I get out and bring ’em to you?”

Prince was reined up, and Sel got out. She went so far back, that, though we strained our eyes to do it, we could not see her. In about two minutes she came up, a pair of gentleman’s gloves in her hand. They were rolled together, were of cloth so black that on a bright night it would never have been seen, and had small brass buttons at the wrist.

Mother took them without a word.

The story leaked out somehow, and spread all over town. It raised a great hue and cry. Four or five antediluvian ladies declared at once that we were nothing more nor less than a family of “them spirituous mediums,” and seriously proposed to expel mother from the prayer-meeting. Masculine Creston did worse. It smiled a pitying smile, and pronounced the whole thing the fancy of “scared women-folks.” I could endure with calmness any slander upon earth but that. I sent by the next mail for Winthrop, and stated the case to him in a condition of suppressed fury. He very politely bit back an incredulous smile, and said he should be *very* happy to see her perform. The answer was somewhat dubious. I accepted it in silent suspicion.

He came on a Saturday noon. That afternoon we attended *en masse* one of those refined inquisitions commonly known as picnics, and Winthrop lost his pocket-knife. Selphar, of course, kept house at home.

When we returned, Winthrop made some careless reference to his loss in her presence, and thought no more of it. About half an hour after, we observed that she was washing the dishes with her eyes shut. The condition had not been upon her five minutes before she dropped

the spoon suddenly into the water, and asked permission to go out to walk. She “saw Mr. Winthrop’s knife somewhere under a stone, and wanted to get it.” It was fully two miles to the picnic grounds, and nearly dark. Winthrop followed the girl, unknown to her, and kept her in sight. She went rapidly, and without the slightest hesitation or search, to an out-of-the-way gully down by the pond, where Winthrop afterwards remembered having gone to cut some willow-twigs for the girls, parted a thick cluster of bushes, lifted a large, loose stone under which the knife had rolled, and picked it up. She returned it to Winthrop, quietly, and hurried away about her work to avoid being thanked.

I observed that, after this incident, masculine Creston became more respectful.

Of several peculiarities in this development of the girl I made at the time careful memoranda, and the exactness of these can be relied upon.

1. She herself, so far from attempting to bring on these trance states, or taking any pride therein, was intensely troubled and mortified by them,—would run out of the room, if she felt them coming on in the presence of visitors.

2. They were apt to be preceded by severe headaches, but came often without any warning.

3. She never, in any instance, recalled anything that happened during the trance, after it was passed.

4. She was powerfully and unpleasantly affected by electricity from a battery, or acting in milder forms. She was also unable at any time to put her hands and arms into hot water; the effect was to paralyze them at once.

5. Space proved to be no impediment to her vision. She has been known to follow the acts, words, and expressions of countenance of members of the family hundreds of miles away, with accuracy; as was afterwards proved by comparing notes as to time.

6. The girl’s eyes, after her trances became habitual, assumed, and always retained, the most singular expression I ever saw on any face. They were oblong and narrow, and set back in her head like the eyes of a snake. They were not—smile if you will, O practical and incredulous reader!—but they were not *human* eyes. The eyes of Elsie Venner are the only eyes I can think of as at all like them.<sup>87</sup> The most horrible circumstance about them—a circumstance that always made me shudder, familiar as I was with it—was, that, though turned fully on you, *they never looked at you*. Something behind them or out of them did the seeing, not they.

7. She not only saw substance, but soul. She has repeatedly told me my thoughts when they were upon subjects to which she could not by any possibility have had the slightest clew.

8. We were never able to detect a shadow of deceit about her.

9. The clairvoyance never failed in any instance to be correct, so far as we were able to trace it.

As will be readily imagined, the girl became a useful member of the family. The lost valuables restored and the warnings against mischances given by her quite balanced her incapacity for peculiar kinds of work. This incapacity, however, rather increased than diminished, and, together with her fickle health, which also grew more unsettled, caused us a

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<sup>87</sup>The narrator compares Selphar’s eyes to those of the protagonist of an 1861 novel by Oliver Wendell Holmes, *Elsie Venner*. Elsie, who is cursed with serpentine characteristics, is noted for her wild eyes: “Black, piercing eyes, not large . . . a face that one could not help looking at for its beauty, yet that one wanted to look away for something in its expression, and could not for those diamond eyes” (75).

great deal of care. The Creston physician—who was a keen man in his way, for a country doctor—pronounced the case altogether undreamt of before in Horatio’s philosophy, and kept constant notes of it.<sup>88</sup> Some of these have, I believe, found their way into the medical journals.

After a while there came, like a thief in the night, that which I suppose was poor Selphar’s one unconscious, golden mission in this world. It came on a quiet summer night, that ended a long trance of a week’s continuance. Mother had gone out into the kitchen to give an order for breakfast. I heard a few eager words in Selphar’s voice, and then the door shut quickly, and it was an hour before it was opened.

Then my mother came to me without a particle of color in lips or cheek, and drew me away alone, and told the secret to me.

Selphar had seen Aunt Alice.

We sat down and looked at one another. There was a singular pinched look about my mother’s mouth.

“Sarah.”

“Yes.”

“She says”—and then she told me what she said. She had seen Alice Stuart in a Western town, seven hundred miles away. Among the living, she desired to be counted of the dead. And that was all.

My mother paced the room three times back and forth, her hands locked.

“Sarah.” There was a chill in her voice—it had been such a gentle voice!—that froze me. “Sarah, the girl is an impostor.”

“Mother!”

She paced the room, once more, three times, back and forth. “At any rate, she is a poor, self-deluded creature. How *can* she see, seven hundred miles away, a dead woman who has been an angel all these years? Think! an *angel*, Sarah! So much better than I, and I—I loved—”

Before or since, I never heard my mother speak like that. She broke off sharply, and froze back into her chilling voice.

“We will say nothing about this, if you please. I do not believe a word of it.”

We said nothing about it, but Selphar did. The delusion, if delusion it were, clung to her, haunted her, pursued her, week after week. To rid her of it, or to silence her, was impossible. She added no new facts to her first statement, but insisted that the long-lost dead was yet alive, with a quiet pertinacity that it was simply impossible to ridicule, frighten, threaten, or cross-question out of her. Clara was so thoroughly alarmed that she would not have slept alone for any mortal—perhaps not for any immortal—considerations. Winthrop and I talked the matter over often and gravely when we were alone and in quiet places. Mother’s lips were sealed. From the day when Sel made the first disclosure, she was never heard once to refer to the matter. A perceptible haughtiness crept into her manner towards the girl. She even talked of dismissing her; but repented it, and melted into momentary gentleness. I could have cried over her that night. I was beginning to understand what a pitiful struggle her life had become, and how utterly alone she must be in it. She *would* not believe—she knew not what. She could not doubt the girl. And with the conflict even her children could not intermeddle.

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<sup>88</sup>“Horatio’s philosophy” refers to a reserved way of thought, an allusion to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*: “There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy” (I.v).



To understand the crisis into which she was brought, the reader must bear in mind our long habit of belief, not only in Selphar’s personal honesty, but in the infallibility of her mysterious power. Indeed, it had almost ceased to be mysterious to us, from daily familiarity. We had come to regard it as the curious working of physical disease, had taken its results as a matter of course, and had ceased, in common with converted Creston, to doubt the girl’s capacity for seeing anything that she chose to, at any place.

Thus a year wore on. My mother grew sleepless and pallid. She laughed often, in a nervous, shallow way, as unlike her as a butterfly is unlike a sunset; and her face settled into an habitual sharpness and hardness unutterably painful to me.

Once only I ventured to break into the silence of the haunting thought that she knew, and we knew, was never escaped by either. “Mother, it would do no harm for Winthrop to go out West, and—”

She interrupted me sternly: “Sarah, I had not thought you capable of such childish superstition. I wish that girl and her nonsense had never come into this house!”—turning sharply away, and out of the room.

Just what that year was to my mother, I suppose only God and she have ever known, or will know.

But it ended. It ended at last, as I had prayed every night and morning of it that it should end. Mother came into my room one night, locked the door behind her, and, walking over to the window, stood with her face turned from me.

“Sarah.”

“Yes.”

“Sarah.”

But that was all, for a little while. Then,—“Sick and in suffering, Sarah,—the girl—she may be right, God Almighty knows! *Sick and in suffering*, you see. I am going. I think, I—”

The voice broke and melted utterly. I stole away and left her alone.

Creston put on its spectacles and looked wise on learning, the next day, that Mrs. Dugald had taken the earliest morning train for the West, on sudden and important business. It was precisely what Creston expected, and just like the Dugalds for all the world,—gone to hunt up material for the genealogical book, or map, or tree, or something, that they thought nobody knew they were going to publish. O yes, Creston understood it perfectly.

Space forbids me to relate in detail the clues which Selphar had given as to the whereabouts of the wanderer. Her trances, just at this time, were somewhat scarce and fragmentary, and the information she had professed to give had come in snatches and very imperfectly,—the trance being apt to end suddenly at the moment when some important question was pending, and then, of course, all memory of what she had said, or was about to say, was gone. The names and appearance of persons and places necessary to the search had, however, been given with sufficient distinctness to serve as a guide in my mother’s rather chimerical undertaking. I suppose ninety-nine persons out of a hundred would have thought her a candidate for the State Lunatic Asylum. Exactly what she herself expected, hoped, or feared, I think it doubtful if she knew. I confess to a condition of simple bewilderment, when she was fairly gone, and Clara and I were left alone with Selphar’s ghostly eyes forever on us. One night I had to lock the poor thing into her garret-room before I could sleep.

Just three weeks from the day mother started for the West, the coach rattled up to the door, and two women, arm in arm, came slowly up the walk. The one, erect, royal, with her great steadfast eyes alight; the other, bent and worn, gray-haired and sallow and dumb, crawling

## What Was the Matter?

feebly through the golden afternoon sunshine, as the ghost of a glorious life might crawl back to its grave.

Mother threw open the door, and stood there like a queen. "Children, your aunt has come home. She is too tired to talk just now. By and by she will be glad to see you."

We took her gently upstairs, into the room where the lilies were mouldering to dust, and laid her down upon the bed. She closed her eyes wearily, turned her face over to the wall, and said no word.

What was the story of those tired eyes I never asked, and I never knew. Once, as I passed the room, a quick picture showed through the open door. The two women lying with their arms about each other's neck, as they used to do when they were children together, and above them, still and watchful, the wounded Face that had waited there so many years for this.

One was speaking with weak sobs, and very low. It was Aunt Alice. I caught but two words,—“My husband.”

But what that husband was remains unknown till the day when the grave shall give up its dead, and the secrets of hearts oppressed and sinned against and sorrowful shall be revealed.

She lingered weakly there, within the restful room, for seven days, and then one morning we found her with her eyes upon the thorn-crowned Face, her own quite still and smiling.

A little funeral train wound away one night behind the church, and left her down among those red-cup mosses that opened in so few months again to cradle the sister who had loved her. Two words only, by my mother's orders, marked the simple headstone,—

“ALICE BROWNING.”

I have given you facts. Explain them as you will. I do not attempt it, for the simple reason that I cannot.

A word must be said as to the fate of poor Sel, which was mournful enough. Her trances grew gradually more frequent and erratic, till she became so thoroughly diseased in mind and body as to be entirely unfitted for household work, and, in short, nothing but an encumbrance. We kept her, however, for the sake of charity, and should have done so, till her poor, tormented life wore itself out; but after the advent of a new servant, and my mother's death, she conceived the idea that she was a burden, cried over it a few weeks, and at last one bitter winter's night she disappeared. We did not give up all search for her for years, but nothing was ever heard from her. He, I hope, who permitted life to be such a terrible mystery to her, has cared for her somehow, and kindly, and well.

## THE DAY OF MY DEATH

Alison was sitting on a bandbox. She had generally been sitting on a bandbox for three weeks, or on a bushel basket, or a cupboard shelf, or a pile of old newspapers, or the baby's bathtub. On one occasion it was the baby himself. She mistook him for the rag-bag.

If ever we had to move again—which all the beneficence of the penates forbid!—my wife should be locked into the parlor, and a cargo of Irishwomen turned loose about the premises to “attend to things.” What it is that women find to do with themselves in this world I have never yet discovered. They are always “attending to things.” Whatever that may mean, I have long ago received it as the only solution at my command of their superfluous wear and tear, and worry and flurry, and tears and nerves and headaches. A fellow may suggest Jane, and obtrude Bridget, and hire Peggy, and run in debt for Mehetabel, and offer to take the baby on 'Change with him, but has he by a feather's weight lightened Madam's mysterious burden? My dear Sir, don't presume to expect it. She has just as much to do as she ever had. In fact, she has a little more. “Strange, you don't appreciate it! Follow her about one day, and see for yourself!” No, Sir; the sooner you learn to accept the situation the better. Accustom yourself to dying and giving no sign—it's the only way for you.

What I started to say, however, was that I thought it over often—I mean about that invoice of Irishwomen—coming home from the office at night, while we were moving out of Artichoke Street into Nemo's Avenue. It is not pleasant to find one's wife always sitting on a bandbox. I have seen her crawl to her feet when she heard me coming, and hold on by a chair, and try her poor little best to look as if she could stand twenty-four hours longer; she so disliked that I should find a “used-up looking house” under any circumstances. But I believe that was worse than the bandbox.

On this particular night she was too tired even to crawl. I found her all in a heap in the corner, two dusters and a wash-cloth in one blue-veined hand, and a broom in the other; an old corn-colored silk handkerchief knotted over her hair—her hair is black, and the effect was good; and her little brown calico apron-string literally tied to the baby, who was shrieking at the end of his tether because he could just not reach the kitten and throw her into the fire. On Alison's lap, between a pile of shirts and two piles of magazines, lay a freshly opened letter. I noticed that she put it into her pocket before she dropped her dusters and stood up to lift her face for my kiss. She forgot about the apron-strings, and the baby tipped up the wrong way, and hung dangling in mid-air.

After we had taken tea—that is to say, after we had drawn around the ironing-board put on two chairs in the front entry, made the cocoa in a tin dipper, stirred it with a fork, and cut the bread with a jack-knife—after the baby was fairly off to bed in a Champagne basket, and Tip disposed of his mother only knew where—we coaxed a consumptive fire into the parlor grate, and sat down before it in the carpetless, pictureless, curtainless, blank, bare, soapy room.

“Thank Fortune this is the last night of it!” I growled, putting my booted feet against the wall—my slippers had gone over to the avenue in a water-pail that morning—and tipping my chair back drearily—my wife *so* objects to the habit!

Allis made no reply, but sat looking thoughtfully, and with a slightly perplexed and displeased air, into the sizzling wet wood that snapped and flared and smoked and hissed and blackened and did every thing but burn.

“I really don't know what to do about it,” she broke silence at last.

“I'm inclined to think there's nothing better to do than to look at it.”

## The Day of My Death

“No; not the fire. O, I forgot—I haven’t shown it to you.”

She drew from her pocket the letter which I had noticed in the afternoon, and laid it upon my knee. With my hands in my pockets—the room was too cold to take them out—I read:

“DEAR COUSIN ALISON,—I have been so lonely since mother died that my health never of the strongest, as you know, has suffered seriously. My physician tells me that something is wrong with the periphrastic action, if you know what that is” [I suppose Miss Fellows meant the peristaltic action], “and prophesies something dreadful (I’ve forgotten whether it was to be in the head, or the heart, or the stomach) if I can not have change of air and scene this winter. I should dearly love to spend some time with you in your new home (I fancy it will be dryer than the old one) if convenient to you. If inconvenient, don’t hesitate to say so, of course. I hope to hear from you soon. In haste, your aff. cousin,

“GERTRUDE FELLOWS.

“P.S.—I shall of course insist upon being a boarder if I come.

G.F.”

“Hum-m. Insipid sort of letter.”

“Exactly. That’s Gertrude. No more flavor than a frozen pear. If she had one distinguishing peculiarity, good or bad, I believe I should like her better. But I’m sorry for the woman.”

“Sorry enough to stand a winter of her?”

“If we hadn’t just been through this moving! A new house and all—nobody knows how the flues are yet, or whether we can heat a spare room. She hasn’t had a home, though, since Cousin Dorothy died. But I was thinking about you, you see.”

“Oh, she can’t hurt me. She won’t want the library, I suppose; nor my slippers, and the small bootjack. Let her come.”

My wife sighed a small sigh of relief out from the depths of her hospitable heart, and the little matter was settled and dismissed as lightly as are most little matters out of which grow the great ones.

I had just begun to dream that night that Gertrude Fellows, in the shape of a large wilted pear, had walked in and sat down on a dessert plate, when Allis gave me a little pinch and woke me.

“My dear, Gertrude has *one* peculiarity. I never thought of it till this minute.”

“Confound Gertrude’s peculiarities! I want to go to sleep. Well, let’s have it.”

“Why, you see, she took up with some Spiritualistic notions after her mother’s death; thought she held communications with her, and all that, Aunt Solomon says.”

“Stuff and nonsense!”

“Of course. But Fred, dear, I’m inclined to think she *must* have made her sewing-table walk into the front entry; and Aunt Solomon says the spirits rapped out the whole of Cousin Dorothy’s history on the mantle-piece, behind those blue china vases—you must have noticed them at the funeral—and not a human hand within six feet.”

“Alison Hotchkiss!” I said, waking thoroughly, and sitting up in bed to emphasize the opinion, “when I hear a spirit rap on *my* mantle-piece, and see *my* tables walking about the front entry, I’ll believe that—not before!”

“Oh, I know it! I’m not a Spiritualist, I’m sure, and nothing would tempt me to be. But still that sort of reasoning has a flaw in it, hasn’t it, dear? The King of Siam, you know—”<sup>89</sup>

I had heard of the King of Siam before, and I politely informed my wife that I did not care to hear of him again. Spiritualism was a system of refined jugglery.<sup>90</sup> Just another phase of the same thing which brings the doves out of Mr. Hermann’s empty hat. It might be entertaining if it had not become such an abominable imposition. There would always be nervous women and hypochondriac men enough for its dupes. I thanked Heaven that I was neither, and went to sleep.

Our new house was light and dry; the flues worked well, and the spare chamber heated admirably. The baby exchanged the Champagne basket for his dainty pink-curtained crib; Tip began to recover from the perpetual cold with which three weeks’ sitting in draughts, and tumbling into water-pails, and playing in the sink, had sweetened his temper; Allis forsook her bandboxes for the crimson easy-chair (very becoming, that chair), or tripped about on her own rested feet; we returned to table-cloths, civilized life, and a fork apiece.

In short, nothing at all worth mentioning happened till that one night—I think it was our first Sunday—when Allis waked me at twelve o’clock with the announcement that some one was knocking at the door. Supposing it to be Bridget with the baby—croup, probably, or a fit—I unlocked and unlatched it promptly. No one was there, however; and telling my wife, in no very gentle tone if I remember correctly that it would be a convenience on such cold nights if she could keep her dreams to herself, I shut the door with an emphasis, and returned to my own.

In the morning I observed a little white circle about each of Allis’s blue eyes, and after some urging she confessed to me that her sleep had been much broken by a singular disturbance in the room. I might laugh at her if I chose, and she had not meant to tell me, but somebody had rapped in that room all night long.

“On the door?”

“On the door; on the mantle; on the foot of the bed; on the head-board. Fred, right on the head-board! I listened till I grew cold listening, but it rapped and it rapped, and by-and-by it was morning, and it stopped.”

“Rats!” said I.

“Then rats have knuckles,” said she.

“Mice!” said I, “wind! broken plaster! crickets! imagination! dreams! fancies! blind headache! nonsense! Next time wake me up, and fire pillows at me till I’m pleasant to you. Now I’ll have a kiss and a cup of coffee. Any sugar in it?”

Tip fell down the cellar stairs that day, and the baby swallowed a needle and two gutta-percha buttons, which I had been waiting a week to have sewed on my vest, so that Alison had enough else to think about, and the little incident of the raps was forgotten. I believe it was not recalled by either of us till after Gertrude Fellows came.

It was on a Monday and in a drizzly storm that I brought her from the station. She was a thin, cold, phantom-like woman, shrouded in water-proofs and green barège veils. Why is that

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<sup>89</sup>The King of Siam, now Thailand, refers to King Mongkut, also known as Rama IV; he reigned from 1851 to 1868. He was a reformist monarch, trained as a Buddhist monk, and a great believer in science, technology, and empirical evidence.

<sup>90</sup>“Juggler” and “jugglery” are mentioned throughout this story as the narrator considers whether or not Gertrude Fellows is a juggler. Rather than meaning a circus performer here, Phelps uses the word with the denotation of “one who deceives by trickery” (*OED*).

## The Day of My Death

homely women always wear green barège veils? She did not improve in appearance when her wraps were off, and she was seated by my parlor grate. Her large green eyes had no speculation in them. Her mouth—an honest mouth, that was one mercy—quivered and shrank when she was addressed suddenly, as if she felt herself to be a sort of foot-ball that the world was kicking about at pleasure—your gentlest smile might prove a blow. She seldom spoke unless she were spoken to, and fell into long reveries, with her eyes on the window or the coals. She wore a horrible sort of ruff—“illusion,” I think Allis called it—which, of all contrivances that she could have chosen to encircle her sallow neck, was exactly the most unbecoming. She was always knitting blue stockings—I never discovered for what or whom; and she wore her lifeless hair in the shape of a small toy cart-wheel, on the back of her head.

However, she brightened a little in the course of the first week, helped Alison about the baby, kept herself out of my way, read her Bible and the *Banner of Light* in about equal proportion, and became a mild, inoffensive, and, on the whole, not unpleasant addition to the family.<sup>91</sup>

She had been in the house about ten days, I think, when Alison, with a disturbed face, confided to me that she had spent another wakeful night with those “rats” behind the head-board; I had been down with a sick headache the day before, and she had not wakened me. I promised to set a trap and buy a cat before evening, and was closing the door upon the subject, being already rather late at the office, when the expression of Gertrude Fellows’s face detained me.

“If I were you I—wouldn’t—really buy a very expensive trap, Mr. Hotchkiss. It will be a waste of money, I am afraid. I heard the noise that disturbed Cousin Alison,” and she sighed.

I shut the door with a snap, and begged her to be so good as to explain herself.

“It’s of no use,” she said, doggedly. “You know you won’t believe me. But that makes no difference. They come all the same.”

“They?” asked Allis, smiling. “Do you mean some of your spirits?”

The cold little woman flushed. “These are not *my* spirits. I know nothing about them. I did not mean to obtrude a subject so disagreeable to you while I was in your family; but I have seldom been in a house in which the Influences were so strong. I don’t know what they mean, nor anything about them, but just that they’re here. They wake me up twitching my elbows nearly every night.”

“Wake you up *how*?”

“Twitching my elbows,” she repeated, gravely.

I broke into a laugh, from which neither my politeness nor the woman’s heightened color could save me, bought the cat and ordered the rat-trap without delay.

That night, when Miss Fellows had “retired”—she never “went to bed” in simple English like other people—I stole softly out in my stockings and screwed a little brass button outside of her door. I had made a gimlet-hole for it in the morning when our guest was out shopping; it fitted into place without noise. Without noise I turned it, and went back to my own room.

“You suspect her, then?” said Alison.

“One is always justified in suspecting a Spiritualistic medium.”

“I don’t know about that,” Allis said, decidedly. “It may have been mice that I heard last night, or the wind in a bottle, or any of the other proper and natural cases that explain away the

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<sup>91</sup>The *Banner of Light* was the newsletter of the Massachusetts Spiritualist Association; it ran in irregular issues from 1865 to 1888.

ghost stories in the children’s papers; but it was not Gertrude. Women know something about one another, my dear; and I tell you it was not Gertrude.”

“I don’t assert that it was; but with the bolt on Gertrude’s door, the cat in the kitchen, and the rat-trap on the garret stairs, I am strongly inclined to anticipate a peaceful night. I will watch for a while, however, and you can go to sleep.”

She went to sleep, and I watched. I lay till half past eleven with my eyes staring at the dark, wide awake and undisturbed and triumphant.

At half past eleven I must confess that I heard a singular sound.

Something whistled at the keyhole. It could not have been the wind, by-the-way, for there was no wind that night. Something else than the wind whistled in at the keyhole, sighed through into the room as much like a long-drawn breath as anything, and fell with a slight clink upon the floor.

I lighted my candle and got up. I searched the floor of the room, and opened the door and searched the entry. Nothing was visible or audible, and I went back to bed. For about ten minutes I heard no further disturbance, and was concluding myself to be in some undefined manner the victim of my own imagination, when there suddenly fell upon the head-board of my bed a blow so distinct and loud that I involuntarily sprang at the sound of it. It wakened Alison, and I had the satisfaction of hearing her sleepily inquire if I had caught that rat yet? By way of reply I relighted the candle, and gave the bed a shove which sent it rolling half across the room. I examined the wall; I examined the floor; I examined the head-board; I made Alison get up, so that I could shake the mattresses. Meantime the pounding had recommenced, in rapid, irregular blows, like the blows of a man’s fist. The room adjoining ours was the nursery. I went in with my light. It was empty and silent. Bridget, with Tip and the baby, slept soundly in the large chamber across the hall. While I was searching the room my wife called loudly to me, and I ran back.

“It is on the mantle now,” she said. “It struck the mantle just after you left; then the ceiling, three times, very loud; then the mantle again—don’t you hear?”

I heard distinctly; moreover, the mantel shook a little with the concussion. I took out the fire-board and looked up the chimney; I took out the register and looked down the furnace-pipe; I ransacked the garret and the halls; finally, I examined Miss Fellow’s door—it was locked as I had left it, upon the outside, and that locked door was the only means of egress from the room, unless the occupant fancied that of jumping from a two-story window upon a broad flight of stone steps.

I came thoughtfully back across the hall; an invisible trip-hammer appeared to hit the floor beside me at every step; I attempted to step aside from it, over it, away from it; but it followed me pounding into my room.

“Wind?” suggested Allis. “Plaster cracking? Fancies? Dreams? Blind headaches?—I should like to know which you have decided upon?”

Quiet fell upon the house after that for an hour, and I was dropping into my first nap, when there came a light tap upon the door. Before I could reach it it had grown into a thundering blow.

“Whatever it is I’ll have it now!” I whispered, turned the latch without noise, and flung the door wide into the hall. It was silent, dark, and cold. A little glimmer of moonlight fell in and showed me the figures upon the carpet, outlined in a frosty bar. No hand or hammer, human or superhuman, was there.

## The Day of My Death

Determined to investigate matters a little more thoroughly, I asked my wife to stand upon the inside of the doorway while I kept watch upon the outside. We took our position, and I closed the door between us. Instantly a series of furious blows struck the door; the sound was such as would be made by a stick of oaken wood. The solid door quivered under it.

“It’s on your side!” said I.

“No, it’s on yours!” said she.

“You’re pounding yourself to fool me,” cried I.

“You’re pounding yourself to frighten me,” sobbed she.

And we nearly had a quarrel. The sound continued with more or less intermission till daybreak. Allis fell asleep, but I spent the time in appropriate reflections.

Early in the morning I removed the button from Miss Fellows’s door. She never knew anything about it.

I believe, however, that I had the fairness to exculpate her in my secret heart from any trickish connection with the disturbances of that night.

“Just keep quiet about this little affair,” I said to my wife; “we shall come across an explanation in time, and may never have any more of it.”

We kept quiet, and for five days so did “the spirits,” as Miss Fellows was pleased to pronounce the trip-hammers.

The fifth day I came home early, as it chanced, from the office. Miss Fellows was writing letters in the parlor. Allis, up stairs, was sorting and putting away the weekly wash. I came into the room and sat down by the register to watch her. I always liked to watch her sitting there on the floor with the little heaps of linen and cotton stuff piled like blocks of snow about her, and her pink hands darting in and out of the uncertain sleeves that were just ready to give way in the gathers, trying the stockings’ heels briskly, and testing the buttons with a little jerk.

She laid aside some under-clothing presently from the rest. “It will not be needed again this winter,” she observed, “and had better go into the cedar closet.” The garments, by-the-way, were marked and numbered in indelible ink. I heard her run over the figures in a busy, housekeeper’s undertone, before carrying them into the closet. She locked the closet door, I think, for I remember the click of the key. If I remember accurately, I stepped into the hall after that to light a cigar, and Alison flitted to and fro with her clothes, dropping the baby’s little white stockings every step or two, and anathematizing them daintily—within orthodox bounds, of course. In about five minutes she called me; her voice was sharp and alarmed.

“Come quick! Oh, Fred, look here! All those clothes that I locked into the cedar closet are out here on the bed!”

“My dear wife,” I blandly observed, as I sauntered into the room, “too much of Gertrude Fellows hath made thee mad. Let *me* see the clothes!”

She pointed to the bed. Some white clothing lay upon it, folded in an ugly way, to represent a corpse, with crossed hands.

“Is it meant for a joke, Alison? You did it yourself, I suppose!”

“Fred! I have not touched it with the tip of my little finger!”

“Gertrude, then?”

“Gertrude is in the parlor writing.”

So she was. I called her up. She looked surprised and troubled.

“It must have been Bridget,” I proceeded, authoritatively, “or Tip.”

“Bridget is out walking with Tip and the baby. Jane is in the kitchen making pies.”



“At any rate these are not the clothes which you locked into the closet, however they came here.”

“The very same, Fred. See, I noticed the numbers: 6 upon the stockings, 2 on the night-caps, and—”

“Give me the key,” I interrupted.

She gave me the key. I went to the cedar closet and tried the door. It was locked. I unlocked it, and opened the drawer in which my wife assured me that the clothes had lain. Nothing was to be seen in it but the linen towel which neatly covered the bottom. I lifted it and shook it. The drawer was empty.

“Give me those clothes, if you please.”

She brought them to me. I made in my diary a careful memorandum of their naming and numbering; placed the articles myself in the drawer—an upper drawer, so that there could be no mistake in identifying it; locked the drawer, put the key in my pocket; locked the door of the closet, put the key in my pocket; locked the door of the room in which the closet was, and put that key in my pocket.

We sat down then in the hall, all of us; Allis and Gertrude to fill the mending-basket, I to smoke and consider. I saw Tip coming home with his nurse presently, and started to go down and let him in, when a faint scream from my wife arrested me. I ran past Miss Fellows, who was sitting on the stairs, and into my room. Allis, going in to put away Tip’s little plaid aprons, had stopped, rather pale, upon the threshold. Upon the bed lay some clothing, folded, as before, in rude, hideous imitation of the dead.

I took each article in turn, and compared the name and number with the names and numbers in my diary. They were identical throughout. I took the clothes, took the three keys from my pocket, unlocked the “cedar room” door, unlocked the closet door, unlocked the upper drawer, and looked in. The drawer was empty.

To say that from this time I failed to own—to myself, if not to other people—that some mysterious influence, inexplicable by common or scientific causes, was at work in my house, would be to accuse myself of more obstinacy than even I am capable of. I propounded theory after theory, and gave it up. I arrived at conclusion upon conclusion, and threw them aside. Finally, I held my peace, ceased to talk of “rats,” kept my mind in a state of passive vacancy, and narrowly and quietly watched the progress of affairs.

From the date of that escapade with the under-clothes confusion reigned in our corner of Nemo’s Avenue. That night neither my wife nor myself closed an eye, the house so resounded and re-echoed with the blows of unseen hammers, fists, logs, and knuckles.

Miss Fellows, too, was pale with her vigils, looked troubled, and proposed going home. This I peremptorily vetoed, determined if the woman had any connection, honest or otherwise, with the mystery, to ferret it out.

The following day, just after dinner, I was writing in the library, when a child’s cry of fright and pain startled me. It seemed to come from the little yard behind the house, and I hurried thither, to behold a singular sight. There was our apple-tree in the yard—an old, stunted, crooked thing; and in that tree I found my son and heir, Tip, tied fast with a small stout rope. “Tied” does not express it; he was gagged, manacled, twisted, contorted, wound about, crossed and recrossed, held without a chance of motion, scarcely of breath.

“You never tied yourself up here, child?” I asked, as I cut the knots.

The question certainly was unnecessary. No juggler could have bound himself in such a fashion; scarcely, then, a four-years’ child. To my continued, clear, and gentle inquiries the boy

## The Day of My Death

replied, persistently and consistently, that nobody tied him there—"not Cousin Gertrude, nor Bridget, nor the baby, nor mamma, nor Jane, nor papa, nor the black kitty;" he was "just tooken up all at once into the tree," and that was all there was about it. He "s'posed it must have been God, or something like that, did it."

Poor Tip had a hard time of it. Two days after that, while his mother and I sat discussing the incident, and the child was at play upon the floor, he suddenly threw himself at full length, writhing with pain, and begging to "have them pulled out, quick!"

"Have *what* pulled out?" exclaimed his terrified mother. She took the child into her lap, and found that he was stuck over from head to foot with large white pins.

"We haven't so many large pins in all the house," she said, as soon as he was relieved.

As she spoke the words thirty or forty *small* pins pierced the boy. Where they came from no one could see. How they came there no one knew. We looked, and there they were, and Tip was crying and writhing as before.

For the remainder of that winter we had scarcely a day of quiet. The rumor that "the Hotchkisses had rented a haunted house" leaked out and spread abroad. The frightened servants gave warning, and other frightened servants took their place, to leave in turn. My wife was her own cook and nursery-maid a quarter of the time. The disturbances varied in character with every week, assuming, as time went on, an importunity which, had we not quietly settled it in our own minds "not to be beaten by a noise," would have driven us from the house.

Night after night the mysterious fingers rapped at the windows, the doors, the floors, the walls. Day after day uncomfortable tricks were sprung upon us by invisible agencies. We became used to the noises, so that we slept through them easily; but many of the phenomena were so strikingly unpleasant, and so singularly unsuited to the ordinary conditions of human happiness and housekeeping, that we scarcely became—as one of our excellent deacons had a cheerful habit of exhorting us to become—"resigned."

Upon one occasion we had invited a small and select number of friends to dine. It was to be rather a *recherché* affair for Nemo's Avenue, and my wife had spared no painstaking to suit herself with her table.<sup>92</sup> We had had a comparatively quiet house the night before, so that our cook, who had been with us three days, consented to remain till our guests had been provided for. The soup was good, the pigeons better, the bread was *not* sour, and Allis looked hopeful, and inclined to trust Providence for the gravies and dessert.

It was just as I had begun to carve the beef that I observed my wife suddenly pale, and a telegram from her eyes turned mine in the direction of General Popgun, who sat at her right hand. My sensations "can better be imagined than described" when I saw General Popgun's fork, untouched by any human hand, dancing a jig on his plate. He grasped it and laid it firmly down. As soon as he released his hold it leaped from the table.

"Really—aw—very singular phenomena," began the General; "very singular! I was not prepared to credit the extraordinary accounts of spiritual manifestations in this house, but—aw—Well, I must say—"

Instantly it was Pandemonium at that dinner-table. Dr. Jump's knife, Mrs. McReady's plate, and Colonel Hope's tumbler sprang from their places. The pigeons flew from the platter, the caster rattled and rolled, the salt-cellars bounded to and fro, and the gravies, moved by some invisible disturber, spattered all over Mrs. Elias P. Critique's *moiré antique*.

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<sup>92</sup> In this case, *recherché* means sophisticated.

Mortified and angered beyond endurance, I for the first time addressed the spirits—wrenched for the moment into a profound belief that they must be spirits indeed.

“Whatever you are, and wherever you are,” I shouted, bringing my hand down hard upon the table, “go out of this room and let us alone!”

The only reply was a furious mazourka of all the dishes on the table. A gentleman present, who had, as he afterward told us, studied the subject of spiritualism somewhat, very skeptically and with unsatisfactory results, observed the performance keenly, and suggested that I try a gentler method of appeal. Whatever the agent was—and what it was he had not yet discovered—he had noticed repeatedly that the quiet modes of meeting it were most effective.

Rather amused, I spoke more softly, addressing the caster, and intimating in my blandest manner that I and my guests would feel under obligations if we could have the room to ourselves till after we had dined. The disturbance gradually ceased, and we had no more of it that day.

A morning or two after Alison chanced to leave half a dozen teaspoons upon the sideboard in the breakfast-room; they were of solid silver, and quite thick. She was going to rub them herself, I believe, and went into the china-closet, which opens from the room, for the silver-soap. The breakfast-room was left vacant, and it was vacant when she returned to it, and she insists, with a quiet conviction which it is hardly reasonable to doubt, that no human being did or could have entered the room without her knowledge. When she came back to the side-board every one of those spoons lay there *bent double*. She showed them to me when I came home at noon. Had they been pewter toys they could not have been more completely twisted out of shape than they were. I took them without any remarks (I began to feel as if this mystery were assuming uncomfortable proportions), put them away, just as I found them, into a small cupboard in the wall of the breakfast-room, locked the cupboard door with the only key in the house which fitted it, put the key in my inner vest pocket, and meditatively ate my dinner.

About half an hour afterward a neighbor “dropped in” to groan over the weather and see the baby, and Allis chanced to mention the incident of the spoons.

“Really, Mrs. Hotchkiss,” said the lady, with a slight smile, and that indefinite, quickly-smothered change of eye which signifies, “I don’t believe a word of it!” “Are you sure that there is not a little mistake somewhere, or a little mental hallucination? The story is very entertaining, but—I beg your pardon—I should be interested to see those spoons.”

“Your curiosity shall be gratified, Madam,” I said, a little testily; and taking the key from my pocket, I led her to the cupboard and unlocked the door. I found those spoons as straight, smooth, and fair as ever spoons had been—not a dent, not a wrinkle, not a bend nor untrue line could we discover anywhere upon them.

“*Oh!*” said our visitor, significantly. That lady, be it recorded, then and thenceforward spared no pains to found and strengthen throughout Nemo’s Avenue the theory that “the Hotchkisses were getting up all that spiritual nonsense to force their landlord into lower rents—and such respectable people, too, to say nothing of their being members in good and regular standing! It did seem a pity, didn’t it?”

One night I was alone in the library. It was late; about half past eleven, I think. The brightest gas jet was lighted, so that I could see to every portion of the small room. The door was shut. There was no furniture but the book-cases, my table, and chair; no sliding doors or concealed corners; no nook or cranny in which any human creature could lurk unseen by me; and I say that I was alone.

I had been writing to a confidential friend a somewhat minute account of the disturbances in my house, which were now of about six weeks’ duration. I had begged him to come and

## The Day of My Death

observe them for himself, and help me out with a solution,—I myself was at a loss for a reasonable one. There certainly seemed to be evidence of superhuman agency; but I was hardly ready yet to commit myself thoroughly to that view of the matter, and—

In the middle of that sentence I laid down my pen. A consciousness, sudden and distinct, came to me that I was not alone in that bright little silent room. Yet to mortal eyes alone I undoubtedly was. I pushed away my writing and looked about. The warm air was empty of outline; the curtains were undisturbed; the little recess under the library table held nothing but my own feet; there was no sound but the ordinary rap-rapping on the floor, to which I had by this time become so accustomed that often it passed unnoticed. I rose and examined the room thoroughly, until quite satisfied that I was its only visible occupant; then sat down again. The rappings had meantime become loud and impatient.

I had learned that very week from Miss Fellows the spiritual alphabet with which she was in the habit of “communicating” with her dead mother. I had never asked her, nor had she proposed, to use it herself for my benefit. I had meant to try all other means of investigation before resorting to it. Now, however, being alone, and being perplexed and annoyed by my sense of having invisible company, I turned and spelled out upon the table so many raps to a letter till the question was complete:

“*What do you want of me?*”

Instantly the answer came rapping back:

“*Stretch down your hand.*”

I put my fingers under the table, and I felt, as indubitably as I ever felt a touch in my life, the grasp of a *warm, human hand*.

I added to the broken paragraph in my friend’s letter a brief account of the occurrence, and reiterated my entreaties that he would come at his earliest convenience to my house. He was an Episcopal clergyman, by-the-way, and I considered that his testimony would uphold my fast-sinking character for veracity among my townspeople. I began to have an impression that this dilemma in which I found myself was a pretty serious one for a man of peaceable disposition and honest intentions to be in.

About this time I undertook to come to a little better understanding with Miss Fellows. I took her away alone, and having tried my best not to frighten the life out of her by my grave face, asked her seriously and kindly to tell me whether she supposed herself to have any connection with the phenomena in my house. To my surprise she answered promptly that she thought she had. I repressed a whistle, and “asked for information.”

“The presence of a medium renders easy what would otherwise be impossible,” she replied. “I offered to go away, Mr. Hotchkiss, in the beginning.”

I assured her that I had no desire to have her go away at present, and begged her to proceed.

“The Influences in the house are strong, as I have said before,” she continued, looking through me and beyond me with her vacant eyes. “Something is wrong. They are never at rest. I hear them. I feel them. I see them. They go up and down the stairs with me. I find them in my room. I see them gliding about. I see them standing now, with their hands almost upon your shoulders.”

I confess to a kind of chill that crept down my back-bone at these words, and to having turned my head and stared hard at the book-cases behind me.

“But they—I mean Something—rapped one night before you came,” I suggested.

“Yes, and they might rap after I was gone. The simple noises are not uncommon in places where there are no better means of communication. The extreme methods of expression, such as you have witnessed this winter, are, I doubt not, practicable only when the system of a medium is accessible. They write all sorts of messages for you. You would ridicule them. I do not repeat them. You and Cousin Alison do not see, hear, feel as I do. We are differently made. There are lying spirits and true, good spirits and bad. Sometimes the bad deceive and distress me, but sometimes—sometimes my mother comes.”

She lowered her voice reverently, and I was fain to hush the laugh upon my lips. Whatever the thing might prove to be to me, it was daily comfort to the nervous, unstrung, lonely woman, whom to suspect of trickery I began to think was worse than stupidity.

From the time of my midnight experience in the library I allowed myself to look a little further into the subject of “communications.” Miss Fellows wrote them out at my request whenever they “came” to her. Writers on Spiritualism have described the process so frequently that it is unnecessary for me to dwell upon it at length. The influences took her unawares in the usual manner. In the usual manner her arm—to all appearance the passive instrument of some unseen, powerful agency—jerked and glided over the paper, writing in curious, scrawly characters, never in her own neat little old-fashioned hand, messages of which, on coming out from the “trance” state, she would have no memory; of many of which at any time she could have had no comprehension. These messages assumed every variety of character from the tragic to the ridiculous, and a large portion of them had no point whatever.

One day Benjamin West desired to give me lessons in oil-painting.<sup>93</sup> The next, my brother Joseph, dead now for ten years, asked forgiveness for his share in a little quarrel of ours which had embittered a portion of his last days—of which, by-the-way, I am confident that Miss Fellows knew nothing. At one time I received a long discourse enlightening me on the arrangement of the “spheres” in the disembodied state of existence. At another, Alison’s dead grandfather pathetically reminded her of a certain Sunday afternoon at “meetin’” long ago, when the child Allis hooked his wig off in the long prayer with a bent pin and a piece of fish-line.

One day we were saddened by the confused wail of a lost spirit, who represented his agonies as greater than soul could bear, and clamored for relief. Moved to pity, I inquired:

“What can we do for you?”

Unseen knuckles rapped back the touching answer:

“Give me a piece of squash pie!”

I remarked to Miss Fellows that I supposed this to be a modern and improved version of the ancient drop of water which was to cool the tongue of Dives.<sup>94</sup> She replied that it was the work of a mischievous spirit who had nothing better to do; they would not infrequently take in that way the reply from the lips of another. I am not sure whether we are to have lips in the spiritual world, but I think that was her expression.

Through all the nonsense and confusion of these daily messages, however, one restless, indefinite purpose ran; a struggle for expression that we could not grasp; a sense of something unperformed which was tormenting somebody.

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<sup>93</sup> Benjamin West (1738-1820) was the first internationally known American artist.

<sup>94</sup> Dives is the rich man in the parable about Lazarus in the Gospel of John. He refuses to help the beggar Lazarus and is, in turn, refused water or comfort after he dies and burns in hell.

## The Day of My Death

One week we had been so much more than usually annoyed by dancing of tables, shaking of doors, and breaking of crockery, that I lost all patience, and at length vehemently dared our unseen tormentors to show themselves.

“Who and what are you?” I cried, “destroying the peace of my family in this unendurable fashion. If you are a mortal man, I will meet you as a mortal man. Whatever you are, in the name of all fairness, let me see you!”

“If you see me it will be death to you,” tapped the Invisible.

“Then let it be death to me! Come on! When shall I have the pleasure of an interview?”

“To-morrow night at six o’clock.”

“To-morrow at six, then, be it.”

And to-morrow at six it was. Allis had a headache, and was lying down upstairs. Miss Fellows and I were with her, busy with Cologne and tea, and one thing and another. I had, in fact, forgotten all about my superhuman appointment, when, just as the clock struck six, a low cry from Miss Fellows arrested my attention.

“I see it!” she said.

“See what?”

“A tall man wrapped in a sheet.”

“Your eyes are the only ones so favored, it happens,” I said, with a superior smile. But while I spoke Allis started from the pillows with a look of fear.

“I see it, Fred!” she exclaimed, under her breath.

“Women’s imagination!” for I saw nothing.

I saw nothing for a moment; then I must depose and say that I *did* see a tall figure, covered from head to foot with a sheet, standing still in the middle of the room. I sprang upon it with raised arm; my wife states that I was within a foot of it when the sheet dropped. It dropped at my feet—nothing but a sheet. I picked it up and shook it; only a sheet.

“It is one of those old linen ones of grandmother’s,” said Allis, examining it; “there are only six, marked in pink with the boar’s-head in the corner. It came from the blue chest up garret. They have not been taken out for years.”

I took the sheet back to the blue chest myself—having first observed the number, as I had done before with the underclothes—and locked it in. I came back to my room and sat down by Allis. In about three minutes we saw the figure standing still as before, in the middle of the room. As before, I sprang at it, and as before the drapery dropped, and there was nothing there. I picked up the sheet and turned to the numbered corner. It was the same that I had locked into the blue chest.

Miss Fellows was inclined to fear that I had really endangered my life by this ghostly rendezvous. I can testify, however, that it was by no means “death to me,” nor did I experience any ill effects from the event.

My friend, the clergyman, made me the desired visit in January. For a week after his arrival, as if my tormentors were bent on convincing my almost only remaining friend that I was a fool or a juggler, we had no disturbance at all beyond the ordinary rappings. These, the reverend gentleman confessed were of a singular nature, but expressed a polite desire to see some of the extraordinary manifestations of which I had written him.

But one day he had risen with some formality to usher a formal caller to the door, when, to his slight amazement and my secret delight, his chair—an easy-chair of good proportions—deliberately jumped up and hopped after him across the room. From this period the mystery “manifested” itself to his heart’s content. Not only did the rocking-chairs, and the cane-seat

chairs, and the round-backed chairs, and Tip’s little chairs, and the afghans chase him about, and the heavy *tête-à-tête* in the corner evince symptoms of agitation at his approach; but the piano trundled a solemn minuet at him; the heavy walnut centre-table rose half-way to the ceiling under his eyes; the marble-topped stand, on which he sat to keep it still, lifted itself and him a foot from the ground; his coffee-cup spilled over when he tried to drink, shaken by an unseen elbow; his dressing-cases disappeared from his bureau and hid themselves, none knew how or when, in his closets and under his bed; mysterious, uncanny figures, dressed in his best clothes and stuffed with straw, stood in his room when he came to it at night; his candlesticks walked, untouched by hands, from the mantel into space; keys and chains fell from the air at his feet; and raw turnips dropped from the solid ceiling into his soup-plate.

“Well, Garth,” said I one day, confidentially, “how are things? Begin to have a ‘realizing sense’ of it, eh?”

“Let me think a while,” he answered.

I left him to his reflections, and devoted my attention for a day or two to Gertrude Fellows. She seemed to have been of late receiving less ridiculous, less indefinite, and more important messages from her spiritual acquaintances. The burden of them was directed at me. They were sometimes confused, but never contradictory, and the sum of them, as I cast it up, was this:

A former occupant of the house, one Mr. Timothy Jabbers, had been in early life connected in the dry-goods business with my wife’s father, and had, unknown to any but himself, defrauded his partner of a considerable sum for a young swindler—some five hundred dollars, I think. This fact, kept in the knowledge only of God and the guilty man, had been his agony since his death. In the parlance of Spiritualism, he could never “purify” his soul and rise to a higher “sphere” till he had made restitution—though to that part of the communications I paid little attention. This money my wife, as her father’s sole living heir, was entitled to, and this money I was desired to claim for her from Mr. Jabbers’s estate, then in the hands of some wealthy nephews.

I made some inquiries which led to the discovery that there had been a Mr. Timothy Jabbers once the occupant of our house, that he had at one period been in business with my wife’s father, that he was now many years dead, and that his nephews in New York were his heirs. We never attempted to bring any claim upon them, for three reasons: In the first place, because we knew we shouldn’t get the money; in the second, because such a procedure would give so palpable an “object” in people’s eyes for the disturbances at the house that we should, in all probability, lose the entire confidence of the entire non-spiritualistic community; thirdly, because I thought it problematical whether any constable of ordinary size and courage could be found who would undertake to summon the witness to testify in the Country Court at Atkinsville.

I mention the matter only because on the theories of Spiritualism it appeared to give some point and occasion to the phenomena, and their infesting that particular house.

Whether poor Mr. Timothy Jabbers felt relieved by having unburdened himself of his confession I can not state; but after he found that I paid some attention to his messages, he gradually ceased to express himself through turnips and cold keys; the rappings grew less violent and frequent, and finally ceased altogether. Shortly after that Miss Fellows went home.

Garth and I talked matters over the day after she left. He had brought his “thinking” to a close, whittled his opinions to a point, and was quite ready to stick them into their places for my benefit, and leave them there, as George Garth left all his opinions, immovable as the everlasting hills.

## The Day of My Death

“How much had she to do with it now—the Fellows?”

“Precisely what she said she had, no more. She was a medium, but not a juggler.”

“No trickery about the affair, then?”

“No trickery could have sent that turnip into my soup-plate, or that candlestick walking into the air. There *is* a great deal of trickery mixed with such phenomena. The next case you come across may be a regular cheat; but you will find it out—you’ll find it out. You’ve had three months to find this out, and you couldn’t. Whatever may be the explanation of the mystery, the man who can witness what you and I have witnessed, and pronounce it the trick of that incapable, washed-out woman, is either a liar or a fool.”

“You understand yourself and your wife, and you’ve tested your servants faithfully; so we’re somewhat narrowed in our conclusions.”

“Well, then, what’s the matter?”

I was, I confess, a little startled by the vehemence with which my friend brought his clerical fist down upon the table, and exclaimed:

“The devil.”

“Dear me, Garth, don’t swear; you in search of a pulpit just at this time, too!”

“I tell you I never spoke more solemnly. I can not, in the face of facts, ascribe all these phenomena to human agency. Something, that comes we know not whence, and goes we know not whither, is at work there in the dark. I am driven to grant to it an extra-human power. Yet when that flabby Miss Fellows, in the trance state, undertakes to bring me messages from my dead wife, and when she attempts to recall the most tender memories of our life together, I can not”—he paused and turned his face a little away—“it would be pleasant to think I had a word from Mary, but I cannot think she is there. I don’t believe good spirits concern themselves with this thing. It has in its fair developments too much nonsense and too much positive sin; read a few numbers of the *Banner*, or attend a convention or two, if you want to be convinced of that. If they’re not good spirits they’re bad ones, that’s all. I’ve dipped into the subject in various ways since I have been here; consulted the mediums, talked with the prophets; I’m convinced that there is no dependence to be placed on the thing. You never learn any thing from it that it is worth while to learn; above all, you never can trust its *prophecies*. It is evil,—*evil* at the root; and except by physicians and scientific men it had better be let alone. They may yet throw light on it; you and I can not. I propose for myself to drop it henceforth. In fact, it looks too much toward putting one’s self on terms of intimacy with the Prince of the Powers of the Air to please me.”

“You’re rather positive, considering the difficulty of the subject,” I said.

The truth is, and it may be about time to own to it, that the three months’ siege against the mystery, which I had held so pertinaciously that winter, had driven me to broad terms of capitulation. I assented to most of my friend’s conclusions, but where he stopped I began a race for further light. I understood then, for the first time, the peculiar charm which I had often seen work so fatally with dabblers in Spiritualism. The fascination of the thing was upon me. I ransacked the papers for advertisements of mediums. I went from city to city at their mysterious calls. I held *séances* in my parlor, and frightened my wife with messages—some of them ghastly enough—from her dead relatives. I ran the usual gauntlet of strange seers in strange places, who told me my name, the names of all my friends, dead or alive, my secret aspirations and peculiar characteristics, my past history and future prospects.

For a long time they never made a failure. Absolute strangers told me facts about myself which not even my own wife knew: whether they spoke with the tongues of devils, or whether,



by some unknown laws of magnetism, they simply *read my thoughts*, I am not even now prepared to say. I think if they had made a miss I should have been spared some suffering. Their communications had sometimes a ridiculous aimlessness, and occasionally a subtle deviltry coated about with religion, like a pill with sugar, but often a significant and fearful accuracy.

Once, I remember, they foretold an indefinite calamity to be brought upon me before sunset on the following Saturday. Before sunset on that Saturday I lost a thousand dollars in mining stock which had stood in all Eastern eyes as solid as its own gold. At another time I was warned by a medium in Philadelphia that my wife, then visiting in Boston, was taken suddenly ill. I had left her in perfect health; but feeling nevertheless uneasy, I took the night train and went directly to her. I found her in the agonies of a severe attack of pleurisy, just preparing to send a telegram to me.

“Their prophecies are unreliable, notwithstanding coincidences,” wrote George Garth. “Let them alone, Fred, I beg of you. You will regret it if you don’t.”

“Once let me be fairly taken in and cheated to my face,” I made reply, “and I may compress my views to your platform. Until then I must gang my own gait.”

I now come to the remarkable portion of my story—at least it seems to me the remarkable portion under my present conditions of vision.

In August of the summer following Miss Fellows’s visit, and the manifestations in my house at Atkinsville I was startled one pleasant morning, while sitting in the office of a medium in Washington Street in Boston, by a singularly unpleasant communication.

“The second day of next May,” wrote the medium—she wrote with the forefinger of one hand upon the palm of the other—“the second of May, at one o’clock in the afternoon, you will be summoned into a spiritual state of existence.”

“I suppose in good English that means I’m going to die,” I replied, carelessly. “Would you be so good as to write it with a pen and ink, that there may be no mistake?”

She wrote it distinctly: “The second of May, at one o’clock in the afternoon.”

I pocketed the slip of paper for further use, and sat reflecting.

“How do you know it?”

“I don’t know it. I am told.”

“Who tells you?”

“Jerusha Babcock and George Washington.”

Jerusha Babcock was the name of my maternal grandmother. What could the woman know of my maternal grandmother? It did not occur to me, I believe, to wonder what occasion George Washington could find to concern himself about my dying or my living. There stood the uncanny Jerusha as pledge that my informant knew what she was talking about. I left the office with an uneasy sinking at the heart. There was a coffin-store nearby, and I remember the peculiar interest with which I studied the quilting of the satin lining, and the peculiar crawling sensation which crept to my fingers’ ends.

Determined not to be unnecessarily alarmed, I spent the next three weeks in testing the communication. I visited one more medium in Boston, two in New York, one in New Haven, one in Philadelphia, and one in a little out-of-the-way Connecticut village where I spent a night, and did not know a soul. All of these people, I am confident, had never seen my face nor heard my name before.

It was a circumstance calculated at least to arrest attention, that these seven people, each unknown to the other, and without concert with the other, repeated the ugly message which had

## The Day of My Death

sought me out through the happy summer morning in Washington Street. There was no hesitation, no doubt, no contradiction. I could not trip them or cross-question them out of it. Unerring, assured, and consistent, the fiat went forth:

“On the second of May, at one o’clock in the afternoon, you will pass out of the body.”

I would not have believed them if I could have helped myself. I sighed for the calm days when I had laughed at medium and prophet, and sneered at ghost and rapping. I took lodgings in Philadelphia, locked my doors, and paced my rooms all day and half the night, tortured by my thoughts, and consulting books of medicine to discover what evidence I could by any possibility give of unsuspected disease. I was at that time absolutely well and strong; absolutely well and strong I was forced to confess myself, after having waded through Latin adjectives and anatomical illustrations enough to make a ghost of Hercules. I devoted two days to medicino-genealogical studies, and was rewarded for my pains by discovering myself to be the possessor of one great-aunt who died of heart disease at the advanced age of two months.

Heart disease, then, I settled upon. The alternative was accident. “Which will it be?” I asked in vain. Upon this point my friends the mediums held a delicate reserve. “The Influences were confusing, and they were not prepared to state with exactness.”

“Why *don’t* you come home?” my wife wrote in distress and perplexity. “You promised to come ten days ago, and they need you at the office, and I need you more than anybody.”

“I need you more than anybody!” When the little clinging needs of three weeks grew into the great want of a lifetime,—oh, how could I tell *her* what was coming?

I did not tell her. When I had hurried home, when she came bounding through the hall to meet me, when she held up her face, half laughing, half crying, and flushing and paling, to mine,—the poor little face that by-and-by would never watch and glow at my coming—I could not tell her.

When the children were in bed and we were alone after tea, she climbed gravely up into my lap from the little cricket on which she had been sitting, and put her hands upon my shoulders.

“You’re sober, Fred, and pale. Something ails you, you know, and you are going to tell me all about it.”

Her pretty, mischievous face swam suddenly before my eyes. I kissed it, put her gently down as I would a child, and went away alone till I felt more like myself.

The winter set in gloomily enough. It may have been the snow-storms, of which we had an average of one every other day, or it may have been the storm in my own heart which I was weathering alone.

Whether to believe those people, or whether to laugh at their predictions; whether to tell my wife, or whether to keep my silence—these questions tormented me through many wakeful nights and dreary days. My fears were in no-wise allayed by a letter which I received one day in January from Gertrude Fellows.

“Why don’t you read it aloud? What’s the news?” asked Alison. But at one glance over the opening page I folded the sheet, and did not read it till I could lock myself into the library alone. The letter ran:

*“I have been much disturbed lately on your behalf. My mother and your brother Joseph appear to me nearly every day, and charge me with some message to you which I cannot distinctly grasp. It seems to be clear, however, as far as this: that some calamity is to befall you in the spring—in May, I should say. It seems to me to be of the nature of death. I do not learn that you can avoid it, but that they desire you to be prepared for it.”*

After receiving this last warning, certain uncomfortable words filed through my brain for days together:

“Set thine house in order, for thou shalt surely die.”

“Never knew you read your Bible so much in all your life,” said Alison, with a pretty pout. “You’ll grow so good that I can’t begin to keep up with you. When I try to read my polyglot the baby comes and bites the corners, and squeals till I put it away and take him up.”

As the winter wore away I arrived at this conclusion: If I were in fact destined to death in the spring my wife could not help herself or me by the knowledge of it. If events proved that I was deluded in the dread, and I had shared it with her, she would have had all her pain and anxiety to no purpose. In either case I would insure her happiness for these few months; they might be her last happy months. At any rate happiness was a good thing, and she could not have too much of it. To say that I myself felt no uneasiness as to the event would be affectation. The old sword of Damocles hung over me.<sup>95</sup> The hair might hold, but it was a hair.

As the winter passed—it seemed to me as if winter had never passed so rapidly before—I found it natural to watch my health with the most careful scrutiny; to avoid improper food and undue excitement; to refrain from long and perilous journeys; to consider whether each new cook who entered the family might have occasion to poison me. It was an anomaly which I did not observe at the time, that while in my heart of hearts I expected to breathe my last upon the second of May, I yet cherished a distinct plan of fighting, cheating, persuading, or overmatching death.

I closed a large speculation on which I had been inclined in the summer to “fly”—Alison could never manage petroleum ventures. I wound up my business in a safe and systematic manner. “Hotchkiss must mean to retire,” people said. I revised my will, and held one long and necessary conversation with my wife about her future should “any thing happen” to me. She listened and planned without tears or exclamations; but after we had finished the talk she crept up to me with a quiet, puzzled sadness that I could not bear.

“You are growing so blue lately, Fred! Why, what can ‘happen’ to you? I don’t believe God can mean to leave me here after you are gone; I don’t believe He *can* mean to!”

All through the sweet spring days we were much together. I went late to the office. I came home early. I spent the beautiful twilights at home. I followed her about the house. I made her read to me, sing to me, sit by me, touch me with her little soft hand. I watched her face till the sight choked me. How soon before she would know? How soon?

“I feel as if we’d just been married over again,” she said one day, pinching my cheek with a low laugh. “You are so good! I’d no idea you cared so much about me. By-and-by, when you get over this lazy fit and go about as you used to, I shall feel so deserted—you’ve no idea! I believe I will order a little widow’s cap, and put it on, and wear it about—now, what do you mean by getting up and stalking off to look out of the window? Fine prospect you must have, with the curtain down!”

It is, to say the least, an uncomfortable state of affairs when you find yourself drawing within a fortnight of the day on which seven people have assured you that you are going to shuffle off this mortal coil. It is not agreeable to have no more idea than the dead (probably not

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<sup>95</sup>The sword of Damocles refers to the Greek legend in which Damocles prays to Dionysius that he should have fortune and power. Dionysius grants the request makes him a king, only to place over his head a sword hanging from a thread, which thereby teaches him to recognize the ever-present fear that burdens a king.

## The Day of My Death

as much) of the manner in which your demise is to be effected. It is not in all respects a cheerful mode of existence to dress yourself in the morning with the reflection that you are never to half wear out your new mottled coat, and that this striped neck-tie will be laid away by-and-by in a little box, and cried over by your wife; to hear your immediate acquaintances all wondering why you *don't* get yourself some new boots; to know that your partner has been heard to say that you are growing dull at trade; to find the children complaining that you have engaged no rooms yet at the beach; to look into their upturned eyes and wonder how long it is going to take for them to forget you; to go out after breakfast and wonder how many more times you will shut that front-door; to come home in the perfumed dusk and see the faces pressed against the window to watch for you, and feel warm arms about your neck, and wonder how soon they will shrink from the chill of you; to feel the glow of the budding world, and think how blossom and fruit will crimson and drop without you, and wonder how the blossom and fruit of life can slip from you in the time of violet smells and orioles.

April, spattered with showers and dripped upon a little with ineffectual suns, slid restlessly away from me, and I locked my office door one night reflecting that it was the night of the first of May, and that tomorrow was the second.

I spent the evening alone with my wife. I have spent more agreeable evenings. She came and nestled at my feet, and the fire-light painted her cheeks and hair, and her eyes followed me, and her hand was in mine; but I have spent more agreeable evenings.

The morning of the second broke without a cloud. Blue jays flashed past my window; a bed of royal pansies opened to the sun, and the smell of the fresh, moist earth came up where Tip was digging in his little garden.

“Not feeling exactly like work to-day,” as I told my wife, I did not go to the office. I asked her to come into the library and sit with me. I remember that she had a pudding to bake, and refused at first; then yielded, laughing, and said that I must go without my dessert. I thought it highly probable that I *should* go without my dessert.

I remember precisely how pretty she was that morning. She wore a bright dress—blue, I think—and a white crocus in her hair; she had a dainty white apron tied on, “to cook in,” she said, and her pink nails were powdered with flour. Her eyes laughed and twinkled at me. I remember thinking how young she looked, and how unready for suffering. I remember—I remember a variety of simple little things that happened that morning—that she brought the baby in after a while, and that Tip came all muddy from the garden, dragging his tiny hoe over the carpet; that the window was open, and that while we all sat there together a little brown bird brought some twine and built a nest on an apple-bough just in sight.

I find it difficult to explain the anxiety which I felt as the morning wore on that dinner should be punctually upon the table at half past twelve. But I now understand perfectly, as I did not once, the old philosophy: “Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.”<sup>96</sup>

It was ironing-day, and our dinners were apt to be light upon ironing-days. I concluded that if the soup were punctual and not too hot, I could leave myself ten or perhaps fifteen unoccupied minutes before one o'clock. It strikes me as curious now, the gravity with which this thought underran the fever and pain and dread of the morning.

I fell to reading my hymn-book about twelve o'clock, and when Alison called me to dinner I did not remember to consult my watch.

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<sup>96</sup>“Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die” alludes to Isaiah 22:13 and 1 Corinthians 15:32.

“Suspecting a spiritualistic medium”: Writing Spiritualism

The soup was good, though hot. A grim Epicurean stolidity crept over me as I sat down before it. A man had better make the most of his last chance at mock-turtle. Fifteen minutes were enough to die in.

I am confident that I ate more rapidly than is consistent with consummate elegance. I remember that Tip imitated me, and that Allis opened her eyes at me. I recall distinctly the fact that I had passed my plate a second time.

I had passed my plate a second time, I say, and had just raised the spoon to my lips, when it fell from my palsied hand; for the little bronze clock upon the mantle struck one.

I sat with drawn breath and glared at it; at the relentless silver hands; at the fierce, and, as it seemed to me, *living* face of the Time on its top, who stooped and swung his scythe at me.

“I would like a very *big* white potato,” said Tip, breaking the solemn silence.

You may or may not believe me, but it is a fact that that is all which happened.

I slowly turned my head. I resumed my spoon.

“The kitchen clock is nearly half an hour too slow,” observed Alison. “I told Jane that you would have it fixed this week.”

I finished my soup in silence.

It may interest the reader to learn that up to the date of this article “I still live.”

## SINCE I DIED

How very still you sit!

If the shadow of an eyelash stirred upon your cheek; if that gray line about your mouth should snap its tension at this quivering end; if the pallor of your profile warmed a little; if that tiny muscle on your forehead, just at the left eyebrow's curve, should start and twitch; if you would but grow a trifle restless, sitting there beneath my steady gaze; if you moved a finger of your folded hands; if you should turn and look behind your chair, or lift your face, half lingering and half longing, half loving and half loth, to ponder on the annoyed and thwarted cry which the wind is making, where I stand between it and yourself, against the half-closed window—Ah, there! You sigh and stir, I think. You lift your head. The little muscle is a captive still; the line about your mouth is tense and hard; the deepening hollow in your cheek has no warmer tint, I see, than the great Doric column which the moonlight builds against the wall. I lean against it; I hold out my arms.

You lift your head and look me in the eye.

If a shudder crept across your figure; if your arms, laid out upon the table, leaped but once above your head; if you named my name; if you held your breath with terror, or sobbed aloud for love, or sprang, or cried—

But you only lift your head and look me in the eye.

If I dared step near, or nearer; if it were permitted that I should cross the current of your living breath; if it were willed that I should feel the leap of human blood within your veins; if I should touch your hands, your cheeks, your lips; if I dropped an arm as lightly as a snowflake round your shoulder—

The fear which no heart has fathomed, the fate which no fancy has faced, the riddle which no soul has read, steps between your substance and my soul.

I drop my arms. I sink into the heart of the pillared light upon the wall. I will not wonder what would happen if my outlines defined upon it to your view. I will not think of that which could be, would be, if I struck across your still-set vision, face to face.

Ah me, how still she sits! With what a fixed, incurious stare she looks me in the eye!

The wind, now that I stand no longer between it and yourself, comes enviously in. It lifts the curtain, and whirls about the room. It bruises the surface of the great pearled pillar where I lean. I am caught within it. Speech and language struggle over me. Mute articulations fill the air. Tears and laughter, and the sounding of soft lips, and the falling of low cries, possess me. Will she listen? Will she bend her head? Will her lips part in recognition? Is there an alphabet between us? Or have the winds of night a vocabulary to lift before her holden eyes?

We sat many times together, and talked of this. Do you remember, dear? You held my hand. Tears that I could not see fell on it; we sat by the great hall-window upstairs, where the maple shadow goes to sleep, face down, across the floor upon a lighted night; the old green curtain waved its hands upon us like a mesmerist, I thought; like a priest, you said.

“When we are parted, you shall go,” you said; and when I shook my head you smiled—you always smiled when you said that, but you said it always quite the same.

I think I hardly understood you then. Now that I hold your eyes in mine, and you see me not; now when I stretch my hand and you touch me not; now that I cry your name, and you hear it not,—I comprehend you, tender one! A wisdom not of earth was in your words. “To live, is dying; I will die. To die is life, and you shall live.”

“Suspecting a spiritualistic medium”: Writing Spiritualism

Now when the fever turned, I thought of this.

That must have been—ah! how long ago? I miss the conception of that for which *how long* stands index.

Yet I perfectly remember that I perfectly understood it to be at three o'clock on a rainy Sunday morning that I died. Your little watch stood in its case of olive-wood upon the table, and drops were on the window. I noticed both, though you did not know it. I see the watch now, in your pocket; I cannot tell if the hands move, or only pulsate like a heart-throb, to and fro; they stand and point, mute golden fingers, paralyzed and pleading, forever at the hour of three. At this I wonder.

When first you said I “was sinking fast,” the words sounded as old and familiar as a nursery tale. I heard you in the hall. The doctor had just left, and you went to mother and took her face in your two arms, and laid your hand across her mouth, as if it were she who had spoken. She cried out and threw up her thin old hands; but you stood as still as Eternity. Then I thought again: “It is she who dies; I shall live.”

So often and so anxiously we have talked of this thing called death, that now that it is all over between us, I cannot understand why we found in it such a source of distress. It bewilders me. I am often bewildered here. Things and the fancies of things possess a relation which as yet is new and strange to me. Here is a mystery.

Now, in truth, it seems a simple matter for me to tell you how it has been with me since your lips last touched me, and your arms held me to the vanishing air.

Oh, drawn, pale lips! Nerveless, dropping arms! I told you I would come. Did ever promise fail I spoke to you? “Come and show me Death,” you said. I have come to show you Death. I could show you the fairest sight and sweetest that ever blessed your eyes. Why, look! Is it not fair? Am I terrible? Do you shrink or shiver? Would you turn from me, or hide your strained, expectant face?

Would she? Does she? Will she? ...

Ah, how the room widened! I could tell you that. It grew great and luminous day by day. At night the walls throbbed; lights of rose ran round them, and blue fire, and a tracery as of the shadows of little leaves. As the walls expanded, the air fled. But I tried to tell you how little pain I knew or feared. Your haggard face bent over me. I could not speak; when I would I struggled, and you said “She suffers!” Dear, it was so very little!

Listen, till I tell you how that night came on. The sun fell and the dew slid down. It seemed to me that it slid into my heart, but still I felt no pain. Where the walls pulsed and receded, the hills came in. Where the old bureau stood, above the glass, I saw a single mountain with a face of fire, and purple hair. I tried to tell you this, but you said: “She wanders.” I laughed in my heart at that, for it was such a blessed wandering! As the night locked the sun below the mountain's solemn watching face, the Gates of Space were lifted up before me; the everlasting doors of Matter swung for me upon their rusty hinges, and the King of Glories entered in and out. All the kingdoms of the earth, and the power of them, beckoned to me, across the mist my failing senses made,—ruins and roses, and the brows of Jura and the singing of the Rhine; a shaft of red light on the Sphinx's smile, and caravans in sand-storms, and an icy wind at sea, and gold adream in mines

## Since I Died

that no man knew, and mothers sitting at their doors in valleys singing babes to sleep, and women in dank cellars selling souls for bread, and the whirl of wheels in giant factories, and a single prayer somewhere in a den of death,—I could not find it, though I searched,—and the smoke of battle, and broken music, and a sense of lilies alone beside a stream at the rising of the sun—and, at last, your face, dear, all alone.<sup>97</sup>

I discovered then, that the walls and roof of the room had vanished quite. The night-wind blew in. The maple in the yard almost brushed my cheek. Stars were about me, and I thought the rain had stopped, yet seemed to hear it, up on the seeming of a window which I could not find.

One thing only hung between me and immensity. It was your single, awful, haggard face. I looked my last into your eyes. Stronger than death, they held and claimed my soul. I feebly raised my hand to find your own. More cruel than the grave, your wild grasp chained me. Then I struggled and you cried out, and your face slipped, and I stood free.

I stood upon the floor, beside the bed. That which had been I lay there at rest, but terrible, before me. You hid your face, and I saw you slide upon your knees. I laid my hand upon your head; you did not stir; I spoke to you: “Dear, look around a minute!” but you knelt quite still. I walked to and fro about the room, and meeting my mother, touched her on the elbow; she only said, “She’s gone!” and sobbed aloud. “I have not *gone!*” I cried; but she sat sobbing on.

The walls of the room had settled now, and the ceiling stood in its solid place. The window was shut, but the door stood open. Suddenly I was restless, and I ran.

I brushed you in hurrying by, and hit the little light-stand where the tumblers stood; I looked to see if it would fall, but it only shivered as if a breath of wind had struck it once.

But I was restless, and I ran. In the hall I met the Doctor. This amused me, and I stopped to think it over. “Ah, Doctor,” said I, “you need not trouble yourself to go up. I’m quite well to-night, you see.” But he made me no answer; he gave me no glance; he hung up his hat, and laid his hand upon the banisters against which I leaned, and went ponderously up.

It was not until he had nearly reached the landing that it occurred to me, still leaning on the banister, that his heavy arm must have swept against and *through* me, where I stood against the oaken moldings which he grasped.

I saw his feet fall on the stairs above me; but they made no sound which reached my ear. “You’ll not disturb me *now* with your big boots, sir,” said I, nodding; “never fear!”

But he disappeared from sight above me, and still I heard no sound.

Now the doctor had left the front door unlatched.

As I touched it, it blew open wide, and solemnly. I passed out and down the steps. I could see that it was chilly, yet I felt no chill. Frost was on the grass, and in the east a pallid streak, like the cheek of one who had watched all night. The flowers in the little square plots hung their heads and drew their shoulders up; there was a lonely, late lily which I broke and gathered to my heart, where I breathed upon it, and it warmed and looked me kindly in the eye. This, I remember, gave

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<sup>97</sup>In describing “all the kingdoms of the earth,” the speaker of “Since I Died” highlights the Jura Mountains, the Rhine River, and the Sphinx, points of geographical or architectural interest. The first two are in Europe, and the latter in Egypt.



“Suspecting a spiritualistic medium”: Writing Spiritualism

me pleasure. I wandered in and out about the garden in the scattering rain; my feet left no trace upon the dripping grass, and I saw with interest that the garment which I wore gathered no moisture and no cold. I sat musing for a while upon the piazza, in the garden-chair, not caring to go in. It was so many months since I had felt able to sit upon the piazza in the open air. “By and by,” I thought, I would go in and upstairs to see you once again. The curtains were drawn from the parlor windows and I passed and repassed, looking in.

All this while the cheek of the east was warming, and the air gathering faint heats and lights about me. I remembered, presently, the old arbor at the garden-foot, where, before I was sick, we sat so much together; and thinking, “She will be surprised to know that I have been down alone,” I was restless, and I ran again.

I meant to come back and see you, dear, once more. I saw the lights in the room where I had lain sick, overhead; and your shadow on the curtain; and I blessed it, with all the love of life and death, as I bounded by.

The air was thick with sweetness from the dying flowers. The birds woke, and the zenith lighted, and the leap of health was in my limbs. The old arbor held out its soft arms to me—but I was restless, and I ran.

The field opened before me, and meadows with broad bosoms, and a river flashed before me like a scimitar, and woods interlocked their hands to stay me—but being restless, on I ran.

The house dwindled behind me; and the light in my sick-room, and your shadow on the curtain. But yet I was restless, and I ran.

In the twinkling of an eye I fell into a solitary place. Sand and rocks were in it, and a falling wind. I paused, and knelt upon the sand, and mused a little in this place. I mused of you, and life and death, and love and agony;—but these had departed from me, as dim and distant as the fainting wind. A sense of solemn expectation filled the air. A tremor and a trouble wrapped my soul.

“I must be dead!” I said aloud. I had no sooner spoken than I learned that I was not alone.

The sun had risen, and on a ledge of ancient rock, weather-stained and red, there had fallen over against me the outline of a Presence lifted up against the sky; and turning suddenly, I saw ...

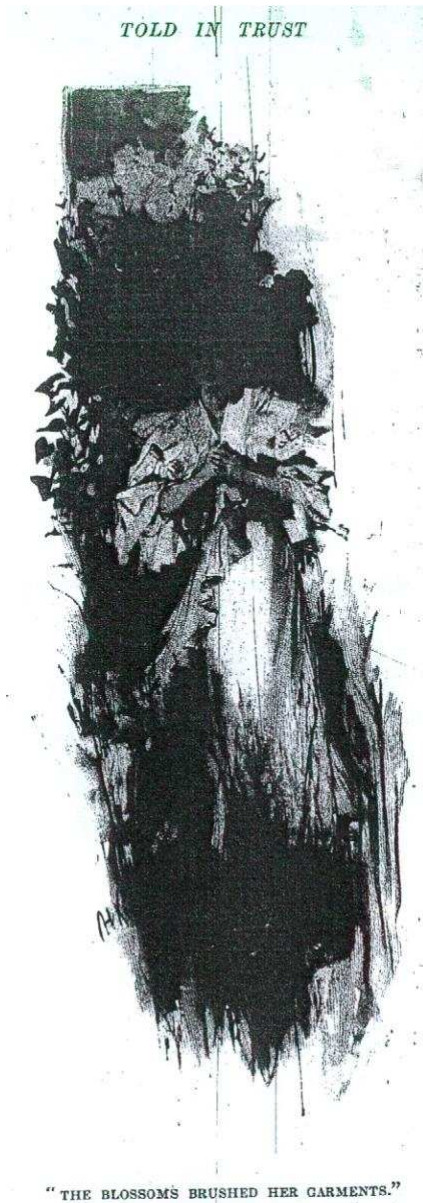
Lawful to utter, but utterance had fled! Lawful to utter, but a greater than Law restrains me! Am I blotted from your desolate fixed eyes? Lips that my mortal lips have pressed, can you not quiver when I cry? Soul that my eternal soul has loved, can you stand enveloped in my presence, and not spring like a fountain to me? Would you not know how it has been with me since your perishable eyes beheld my perished face? What my eyes have seen, or my ears have heard, or my heart conceived without you? If I have missed or mourned for you? If I have watched or longed for you? Marked your solitary days and sleepless nights, and tearless eyes, and monotonous slow echo of my unanswering name? Would you not know?

“Alas! would she? Would she not?” My soul misgives me with a matchless, solitary fear. I am called, and I slip from her. I am beckoned, and I lose her.

Her face dims, and her folded, lonely hands fade from my sight.

Time to tell her a guarded thing! Time to whisper a treasured word! A moment to tell her that *Death is dumb, for Life is deaf!* A moment to tell her.—

## TOLD IN TRUST



The train was late. Most of the passengers accepted this circumstance with the good-humor characteristic of the American traveller, and known to be the first condition of existence to the American commuter. For this was a suburban train—playing with time, and ignoring the rush of life with a kind of well-mannered obduracy, against which it had long since ceased to occur to anybody to argue or appeal. The Happy Home Valley Railroad got there when it chose to; and its patrons regarded the usual delay with the usual uncomplaining apathy.

One of the passengers was less complacent towards the leisure of the corporation. He was, in fact, restless past the point of impatience, and his extraordinary indisposition to accept the nature of things attracted the surprised attention of such commuters as were not asleep, or mummied in the first editions of the afternoon papers. He spoke to one of them, saying, rather brusquely,

“Is it always like this nowadays?”

“Like what?” asked the commuter, drowsily.

“The train. Doesn’t it ever make time?”

“Oh—the train? Yes, by accident, once in a while. Not often. We count on getting there about just so late, you see. Comes to the same thing.”

“I sha’n’t put up with it,” returned the impatient passenger. “I shall complain to the corporation.”

“Shall you?” replied the commuter, listlessly. He was a little, gentle, blond-bearded man, with a thin hand, and a wedding-ring upon it. He smiled the smile of a man who would say, “We’ve all taken our turns at that,” but thinks better of it, and avoids the trouble.

The train had now come to one of those unexpected and mysterious stops with which it was in the habit of amusing its patrons. It was a single-track route, and the

surroundings were proportionally rural. Although but fifteen miles from town, the bronchial locomotive had dipped into the lap of generous fields and billowy green outlines. It was June, when even the unalleviated suburbs assume a celestial glamour; and when the open country wears the face of Paradise.

The impatient passenger got up and went out on the platform, where he hung to the rail for a while, in the feverish hope of entrapping some railway official to come and explain himself to the public. But not so much as a brakeman presented so much as a square foot of surface to the assault. They knew the type. They had fled, to a man. As the passenger clung to the rail with one hand—one foot on the step, and the other swinging—the branch of a honeysuckle-bush

leaning over a wall smote him in the face, then swept back again into a pretty cultivated garden. A commuter who had been asleep suddenly roused.

“Great Scott!” he said. “If this thundering train hasn’t stopped at my back door! If I went on to the station, I’d have to walk seven-eighths of a mile.”

He pushed by the passenger hanging on the rail, leaped over the honeysuckle-bush, and ran up his own garden. As he ran he whistled. A young wife, in a light dress, with a baby in her arms, appeared suddenly on a piazza, like a Madonna in a frame. The commuter took off his hat and swung it like a boy, and the Madonna threw kisses at him. One could hear her laugh out joyously. Several people on the train smiled and nodded pleasantly. The Happy Home Valley Railroad was used to such pretty sights.

“And he left her only this morning!” blazed the impatient passenger. “I’m three miles from home yet. And I’ve been gone three years.”

He spoke aloud; but no one answered him, for the simple reason that nobody heard him. He had expected to find the train full of old neighbors, and to meet even a friend or so; he had indeed dreamed of quite a little ovation—almost any returning naval officer gets that, when his time is up—and he was disappointed because he had not seen a single familiar face. Even the conductor was new; and the brakeman whom he used to jolly was gone.

He came back into the train and strolled through the smoker, but put down his cigar as soon as he had lighted it.

“It would spoil the first kiss for her—after so long. I’ll wait,” he thought. He came back to the car where he had left his valise and coat, and sat down more patiently. Tipping his head back, he closed his eyes, and drew his hat over them; for his thoughts had turned to dreams.

The last letter he had from her was at Bahia. The last he had sent her was from Key West. The ship had made a better voyage than could have been expected (for she was a lumbering thing, belonging to the navy before the Navy), and had dropped anchor in the harbor a week before he had hoped to land. He had sent no telegram or telephone. He was ecstatic in the luxury of surprising her ... Oh, three years! They had never got used to it. Some people did. But Mary was not like those women; he was not one of such men. The cruelty of it fell on her; he was beginning to understand that. Like other girls who marry officers, she had thought at first that she was prepared for her fate; but she had found at the last that she could never be prepared for it. She did not complain—Mary never complained. Only, once she had sat looking out of the window watching the neighbors come home by the evening train, and said, passionately: “I wish you were a clerk—or a grocer! I wouldn’t mind if you sold nails, or dress-goods ... You could come home—like other men.”

She had not borne the last voyage very well. She had pined under the separation, and lost color and weight. Then, being happy, she grew well and lovely—until the familiar tragedy came on again. He remembered how weak she was the last month or so before he sailed; how her heart fluttered against his when he held her to say good-by; it had a curious motion, like that of a wounded bird—three or four leaps, and then a pause. He had not quite liked it; but he supposed that was the way women were constituted; the whole action of the arterial system, like that of every other part of the organism, was finer, more mysterious, more easily disarranged. Once she had said to her mother, “I can’t bear many more of these voyages.” But she had never said so to

## Told In Trust

him. He felt his lashes grow wet under his broad-brimmed hat; and, starting, looked shamefacedly down on his black coat, for which he had joyously exchanged his uniform. The train had now begun to move. His excitement increased to agitation ... *Mary!*

Only three more miles—perhaps six minutes—and the house was close by; as near to the track as that place with the honeysuckle where the man jumped over the wall and ran up the garden to meet his wife and baby. It was but a minute's walk from the station—half a minute's run, by the short-cut ... *Mary! Mary!*

The train had started, but it halted at the intervening station longer than usual; there seemed some vacillation in its management; the conductor consulted with the station-master a trifle gravely; the delay made the blood storm in the heart of Lieutenant Trent.

"I believe I'll get out and walk," he thought. He had started, in fact, to do so, when the blond-bearded man observed:

"She's off again. Better calm down—if it's *in* you. You'll get there quicker to stick to the ship."

These words aroused the professional instincts of a lifetime in the naval officer. Respect for order, regard for discipline, loyalty to habit and constitution, fidelity to the vehicle of transportation, were second nature with Albert Trent. He took his seat again; although he did not reply to the blond-bearded man, at whom he glanced with some official dignity. The train had, indeed, started, and now put on a full head of steam. Rose-bushes and hydrangeas, weigelas and spirea dashed by in the bright gardens. All the cultivated, blossoming scenery melted in the late, slanting summer light.

There was the village—the woodbine-wreathed station ... *Home!* He could see it—pretty, modest, white like Mary. There was the cottage, behind the larches and the spruces—just a glimpse. In a minute they would pass the clumps of cedar and the poplar belt—then nothing would come between the eye and the house. Then nothing more between himself and Mary. He folded his coat and picked up his valise; then he laid down his valise and picked up his coat. A spark of delirious joy burned deep down in his eyes. His lips trembled beneath his mustache.

The train had now unexpectedly taken wings. The poplars and the cedars dashed past. The velvet of his own lawn was so near that he could have thrown his valise over upon it. Look!—the little foolish fish-pond that he had built for her—it hadn't any fish in it—and the rustic summer-house beside it. How the woodbine had grown! No—there was no one on the piazza. He felt accountably aggrieved. What was that buggy doing outside?

"Down brakes!" Four screaming whistles tore the air, and the car thrilled and throbbed to them. There was a grinding jar, followed by a moment of which one could only say that the whole train seemed to stand at an awful attention, like a soldier sentenced to execution—the moment before the order to fire is given.

"My God!" said the blond-bearded man. Lieutenant Trent leaped to his feet. He heard the passengers cry out; he saw them spring. Then he saw the express bearing upon them. The great locomotive seemed to crouch for an instant and to open its jaws. Then it crunched the rear car down its throat.

Albert Trent fought like a sailor and an officer for his life. The blond man struggled like a salesman; certain of the passengers battled hotly enough to save themselves; but in all the

“Suspecting a spiritualistic medium”: Writing Spiritualism

Lieutenant’s instincts and movements there was the fierce intelligence of one who has faced danger all his days.

He had been struck insensible at first—he felt a positive shame in admitting the fact, but he was forced to that conclusion. Consciousness returned to him like another blow. He was pinned in ruin, smoke, flame, steam. To be ground, asphyxiated, scorched, and scalded—what a multiform death! He thought of one or two shipwrecks that he had experienced, and remembered the cool, leisurely assault of the sea with the landsman’s scorn of this method of closing his career.

“This is unmanly!” he called to Death. “You’re a coward!”

As such men do, he wrestled for salvation beneath the blazing wreck. He could bear groans, and heart-rending cries for help, the shouts of rescuers outside, the blunt blows of axes, the gritting of the teeth of saws. He did not cry out.

“I am wedged in under a driving-rod,” he said, quietly, aloud. “I think, if you could pry it up—” But no one heard him. He tore at the wreck magnificently. One of the rusty bars supplied by the corporation for emergencies lay within reach. He managed to get hold of it, and so wrenched and commanded the driving-rod. The blistering steam poured in his eyes, his throat, his lungs.

“I must get out of this, somehow,” he said ... Thank God! The bar dropped and lay on the gravel ... Something yielded in the weight that nailed him down. He crawled out by inches. He tried to stand, but found himself weak, at first. He sat down on a piece of the wreck and covered his face with his hands. For the moment he was drowned in his consciousness of life preserved.

Then he remembered that other passengers might not be as fortunate. He stood upright—but rather feebly, for the shock had been great—and looked about him. The citizens and the fire department were excitedly at work, quenching flames, hacking timbers, pulling out passengers—some living, some dead, many wounded, some without a bruise. He offered his services to help in the rescue, but these did not seem to be needed. He was still so weak that plainly he could be of little or no assistance. Yet they did not want to hurt his feelings by telling him so.

As he was moving away, his foot hit something soft, and he stooped to examine it. It was a man’s hand, with a marriage-ring upon the third finger. Lieutenant Trent’s eyes followed the arm to the shoulder—to the face. The blond-bearded man lay wedged in the wreck. He was quite dead.

Something in this discovery turned Trent sick to the soul. He recoiled from the sight, and said aloud:

“I had forgotten my wife ... She will be in agony. I can come back and help here afterwards. I must get to Mary at once.”

It did not occur to him that she did not know he was aboard that train.

He turned away from the wreck; yet slowly, and with a certain irresolution. It was but a few steps to the stone wall which bounded his little, rented place—the old-fashioned rustic wall which Mary had refused to exchange for any of the conventional suburban boundary effects. He had thought to leap over and rush up to the house—as that passenger did who was so lucky as to get off three miles below. But he found himself not yet quite strong enough for any athletic experiments. He climbed over sedately enough, and stepped upon his own lawn, where he stood

## Told In Trust

to get breath and look about him. He stood under a large linden, in the shade. The clump of larches was beyond; the late sun, now descending brilliantly, fired all the grass, and blade by blade stood out like swords of flame. It was as if an invisible army of dwarf combatants, springing from the heart of the earth, was serried between himself and his home. Part of the place was unmown—that was Mary's fancy; she said she hated grass cut "fighting cut"—and clover and daisies and buttercups rioted, tall and luxuriant.

The buggy that he had noticed in front of the house was gone. There was still no one on the piazza. His wife's mother came to a window and drew in a blind. She did not see him. He wondered that the cook did not run out to gape at the wrecked train. No one in the house seemed to indicate any interest in the accident, or perhaps to be aware of it at all. Women, living alone, were always so slow in getting at news! An unaccountable reluctance had now possessed him. What if he took his wife altogether too much by surprise? He remembered those long, thumping beats of her heart—he had never thought much about them before. She might be over-agitated. She must not be startled. Had he better steal around to the back door, and get word to her mother to break it to Mary that he had come? His wild impatience fell into embers. A curious uneasiness flared up here and there through the ashes of his mad restlessness to see her.

He struck across the lawn towards the side of the house, and walked for a moment thoughtfully, with his head upon his breast. When he looked up, his soul seemed to him to stand still in his body.

The screen door of the house opened slowly, and someone came out upon the piazza, and stood there, for a moment, irresolute. It was a woman. It was his wife. She put back her delicate hand to shut the screen door without slamming—how like her!—and gazed out over the lawn.

She did not see him yet, and he stood quite still. He had lived this moment over in his heart until he had thought he knew precisely what he should do, and what he should say to her—how he should touch her—the clasp and the kiss first; then the embrace of the eyes; the words last. But now he did nothing that he had expected, or as he had expected. The husband stood like a bashful lover, remote and ardent, watching the lady leaning over the veranda rail.

She did not stir immediately, but remained, a beautiful, musing figure, carved among the vines, against the dark house; her contours, almost attenuated, fragile, exquisite, seemed like those of an intaglio in the shadowed spot; she seemed half expressed, like a new life or an unfinished thought. He watched her adoringly.

She moved, and put her foot over the edge of the upper stair with something like hesitation, then slowly descended the steps. He wondered that she did not see him even yet; and then wondered still more at his own delay in making his presence known. His feeling stifled him at the sight of her.

She stirred down the path, uncertainly, glancing about her in rather a wistful way.

"That's the way she is when I am gone," he thought. "What a lonely little woman! I didn't suppose she looked like *that*. God forgive me!—I believe I'll never leave her again."

She stood for a moment on the path, irresolute; then turned, with more quickness of decision than she had shown before, and glided across the lawn in his direction.

“Suspecting a spiritualistic medium”: Writing Spiritualism

Panting and agitated, he concealed himself still, for he had stepped behind a clump of spruces, and planned for himself afresh the delight of surprising her when she should come within his reach. He decided, in his own mind, that he would reveal himself when she came up to that cluster of daisies about ten feet away; then he settled on the twelve buttercups that grew together some twenty feet or so yonder; but the snow of a spiraea-bush two rods beyond attracted his eye, and his bounding heart determined:

“It shall be the spiraea. I can’t wait beyond the spiraea.”

Sliding along the grass, her white dress brushing the tops of the unmown clovers, she advanced gently. Her eyes had their sweet, deep color. Her lips trembled with feeling. A little smile curved them. She looked less sad as she drew nearer. How beautiful! Her fine hand hung at her side; he thought he could see the glint of her marriage-ring beneath the transparent folds of her dress. The blossoms of the spiraea swept her garment, and their soft snow drifted all over her ...

“*Mary!*”

He came from behind the spruces and spoke—distinctly, he thought; but his agitation was so great that he did not make her hear him plainly. She stopped, and stood looking about her, evidently in perplexity. Her face melted with the sensitiveness of a lonely woman whose consciousness of the absent beloved is so much a part of her life that she can scarcely distinguish between his voice and her dreams of his voice. Had her ear, trained to the fine clair audience of separation, heard, God knew what, when he was seven thousand miles away? Now, that he was almost near enough to touch her, she did not dare trust herself to believe that it was he who spoke.

Her own lips moved, and she said, pathetically:

“That *sounds* like Albert ... But the ship isn’t in.”

Then he held out his arms; for he could bear it no longer; and he spoke again.

“*Mary!—Mary!—Mary!*” over and over. He could not seem to get beyond that one word. And he ran to meet her, for the trifling space between them seemed as wide as that between the hemispheres. Oh, it seemed as far as that between the worlds! Mad to annihilate it, he rushed over the barrier-marks of the buttercups and of the daisies that he had thought himself able to set and to keep.

She stood for the moment, as still as a statue of lovely death carved by the imagination of a high creative nature, which saw in his subject only the most tender, the most beautiful, the most enviable thing in the world. Then such a cry ran through the summer evening as would have broken a man’s heart for anguish (since he loved her), if he could not have kissed it into silence on her lips.

“It *looks* like Albert ... But the ship isn’t in.”

He caught her as if he caught her out of shipwreck—with a fierce instinct to preserve her from he knew not what harm. His arms, his lips, his breath, claimed her, while it seemed as if they saved her. She laid her head back with a long sigh, and closed her eyes. She had gone so pale that he thought she must have fainted, or that one of those seizures at the heart had overtaken her. He gathered her more gently, and reverently laid his cheek to hers.

## Told In Trust

“There, my darling, there! There! Don’t be frightened. Hush, Mary!” Then his other mood rode over him, and he exclaimed, exultantly,

“*Isn’t the ship in?*”...

How long had they sat there? The sunset and the twilight and the solemn oncoming moonlight knew. But their throbbing hearts knew nothing.

Neither inclined to go into the house. Clinging and clasping, they moved over the lawn, behind the lengthening shadows of the house and the trees. No one happened to observe them, and they thought of nobody. Neither remembered, for a while, the existence of any other life than that which bounded in their souls. At first they could not talk. Her ecstasy half slew her; his joy awed him altogether.

They went over by the little fish-pond that had no fish, and hid themselves in the summer-house, side by side upon the low divan, and experienced for the time only a keen pleasure in the fact that they could be alone and undisturbed.

There they forgot the world and all that was therein. Speech and silence alternated like the inhalation and exhalation of a healthy, happy breath. Moments which words would have profaned were succeeded by words that overrode thought and carried feeling to its heights. Young lovers parted and met again never knew the happiness of these reunited married people. That other bliss was a poor thing beside this ecstasy. They talked of everything; they kept nothing back; they poured out their heart’s wine and held it to each other’s lips. They tried to tell each other all that had happened since he went away—hurrying and stumbling over a selection of events which seemed to leave everything unsaid; and then beginning again somewhere at random, and, for very bewilderment of joy, hitting on some little unimportant thing, some trifle that did not matter, only to check themselves and say,

“But I forgot to tell you,” or,

“Oh, I forgot! You did not know—” and then:

“I missed you so! Oh, I missed you till my heart broke for you, Albert!”

“And I you—till I could have left the service for you, Mary.”

“And I thought every minute: ‘Did I do enough for him when he was with me? I will do this. I will do that. I will do everything for him when he gets home.’”

“And I thought every day: ‘Did I cherish her when I had her? When I get her again, I will worship her.’”

“Oh, did you really feel like *that*?”

“A hundred thousand times! And like this—and this—and *this*.”

The young moon trembled in the sky. The night was far and fair. The world seemed as spacious as the dome of heaven. The vines on the garden-house vibrated, and delicate shadows of leaf and stem and tendril, unreal and exquisite, stirred across the threshold, and quivered on the walls and ceiling. The perfume of the June flowers seemed intensified, carried up into the grasp of a new sense. The familiar perfumes were like those of the flora of strange countries. The shadow fresco on the interior of the little, silent, sacred room appealed to the eyes as if vision were a power but just discovered; or as if the old power were brought into a phase of being of which it was written that all things shall become new.



“Suspecting a spiritualistic medium”: Writing Spiritualism

Their own voices sounded in their own ears something strange and thrilling—like music never heard before. When their lips met, it was as if they had never kissed till now.

“Oh, I have suffered so,” she said, “since—since—”

“You shall never suffer so again,” he vowed to her. “I will not let you. You shall come and be near me—or else—”

“I will not have you leave the service for me,” she said, proudly. She could say these things and mean them when he had just come home. “I have you for three years now!” she cried joyously. “It seems as long as eternity.”

“It shall *be* as long as eternity,” replied the man. “Whom God has joined together—as He joined us, Mary—nothing ought to put asunder. I’ve been thinking that for a long time ... You shall never live three years without me again.”

“Dear,” she said, suddenly, lifting her head. “I’ve just thought of something.”

“And so have I,” he answered, in an altered tone.

“Albert! ... I have forgotten everything but you.”

“And I everything on earth—but you, Mary.”

“Mother will be worried,” said Mary Trent, in her natural voice. “I haven’t been well. I was quite sick yesterday. She must wonder where I am.”

They moved apart and regarded each other. Their eyes brimmed with a love and a comprehension of the nature of love, which it seemed a profanity to interrupt. But her sweet sense of duty held her now. “I must go right in and tell mother. She had the doctor to see me yesterday—and to-day. I’ve had some bother at my heart. (I was thinking about the ship you see, dear.) She was troubled. The doctor did me a great deal of good to-day. I never knew him help me so much before. I am quite well. Oh, I am quite strong now! I felt so much better, I slipped out to get the air ... And then I saw you ... Mother will be dreadfully worried when she finds me gone. We must go straight in and see mother.”

They went out of the garden-house, moving rather slowly, and stood by the foolish fish-pond for a moment, lingering, reluctant to breathe on the surface of the most beautiful hour of their lives and cloud its mirror, in which their own best and happiest selves had been revealed to them, as neither joy nor sorrow, meeting nor parting, had ever revealed anything to them before. They looked down into the depths of the little pond. It seemed as if they were looking into a well of feeling, a spring of joy, from which one might draw out forever.

“I forgot the accident,” he said, abruptly. “I don’t see how I could. I meant to go back and help those people ... as soon as I had seen you. I only meant to tell you I was not hurt. It was right out there—a terrible collision! I must go back and see what I can do for them.”

“And you were on that train!” she cried, impetuously. Then she added, slowly: “Why, I didn’t know there was an accident. I suppose nobody told me, because I was sick ... Of course you must go. Come in and see mother with me. Just a minute. Then I’ll go straight out with you ... Can’t we bring some of those poor people into the house and take care of them?”

Still clinging together, arm within arm, they hurried back over the bright lawn towards the house. The moonlit earth had a strange and sacred look. The unmown grass scarcely bowed beneath the weight of their light-hearted feet. The daisies, the clover, and the buttercups met

## Told In Trust

them like new friends. The snow of the spiraea touched but did not drift upon her white garments as she passed the bush. The breathing of the relief locomotive could be heard, beyond the stone wall, where the crowd collected by the accident was still visible.

“What is that coming up the path?” he said, stopping short.

A group of neighbors was entering the place. Their heads were bared. Between them they carried something heavy. It was a human figure, and its face was covered.

They did not see the husband and wife, who stood, perplexed, pale, half stunned with the piteous sight.

“They are bringing one of the wounded in now,” she whispered, shrinking in spite of herself. “Let us go and help.”

At this moment one of the bearers spoke in a low voice:

“So near his own home—just over the hill—and he’d been gone three years, poor fellow! It’s hard. He must have been killed instantly—by that driving-rod.”

“Are you sure the news has been broken to the widow?” asked another neighbor, pausing and panting; he glanced towards the house, fearfully. “I must say I never did think I hadn’t *rather* do—than this. She’s sickly, too.”

At this moment an elderly lady came down the steps. Her gray head was not covered. Her face was tear-stained and racked. Yet it bore a high expression. She extended both trembling hands.

“Do not feel afraid, gentlemen,” she said, brokenly. “Bring him in. Bring him home. This cannot hurt her—now. She died an hour and a half ago.”

The bearers and the body passed on and up the steps. The mother held the door open, silently, and the body and the bearers passed out of sight within the house. A long, black vehicle on the side street drew up, and the driver fastened the horses, and the cook came out, crying, and beckoned him in the back door. Lights moved in the house, and shades were drawn. The neighbors who had done the master of the home this last service came out and walked away, softly. One man said, “What a tragedy!” But another said, “What a miracle!” The rest said nothing at all. Their steps gritted on the gravel walk; then padded on the concrete; then ceased against the ear. The house remained closed.

The two looked into each other’s eyes. Their first expression was one of something like fear. This emotion their perfect love cast out, as perfect love casts out all lesser fact or feeling on either side of the incident called death. To a fine relief succeeded an awed delight. She was the first to speak:

“Oh, if I had lived—and you had died!”

“If I had come home alive, and found you dead!” he cried.

She dropped upon her knees, and lifted her face towards the sky. Her lips moved. He saw that she was praying; so he knelt beside her, and they clasped hands.

Then it was that the wide, moonlit night summoned them suddenly—stars and space and ether, the secrets of mystery, and the majesty of the life eternal. Clinging together, enraptured, they glided solemnly away. This was the lot of the love that is larger than life, and stronger than death; and most of us may envy it.

“Suspecting a spiritualistic medium”: Writing Spiritualism

That which is told of them here is told in trust. He that hath the ear shall hear it. And for him who hath not, it cannot signify.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

“A NEW TYPE OF EMPLOYER”: WRITING SOCIAL REFORM

Blythe  
My Story  
Not a Pleasant story  
Tammyshanty

## INTRODUCTION

The nineteenth century saw the rise of social work as we know it today, and it grew out of organizations formed to address specific social problems and alleviate suffering. Women were the motivating force for a good deal of this work, as they moved from working for abolition to working for suffrage and wider social reform. Women, Janet Fishburn points out, were seen as the source of social order through their moral influence on the family (87). Women founded organizations to address the problem of poverty, such as the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children founded in 1797), and the New York Orphan Asylum Society (founded in 1797 and 1806, respectively). Women also formed associations meant to combat specific social ills, such as the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, a reform organization that grew out of a popular crusade and was founded in 1873 (Blocker 461). Temperance was intended to bring about widespread change, Carol Mattingly suggests, as female temperance workers "sincerely believed that alcohol consumption should be controlled and that such control would improve conditions for women and their children" (15). There were also charities created to support those directly affected by the Civil War, such as the Women's Central Association of Relief, which held its founding meeting in 1861. The various groups that worked for female suffrage also worked against unfair laws, such as the one in Massachusetts that forbid married women from holding a business partnership. This law was repealed in 1874, too late for the woman in "My Story," included below (Sewall 8). Women were also leaders in the anti-vivisection societies, which fought to legally ban the practice of experimentation on live, unanesthetized animals, and women played a significant role in labor reform. They brought affective power with their humanism and concern as they entered this particularly complex cultural discourse of reform, a discourse fraught by issues of class, race, ethnicity, and gender.

Elizabeth Stuart Phelps was one of those women, a self-acknowledged reformer who knew her various agenda were not uniformly popular. She writes of reactions to this avocation in her autobiography: "Where *did* she get it?" conservative friends used to wail, whenever I was seen to have tumbled into the last new and unfashionable reform" (*Chapters* 6). That Phelps identifies as conservative those opposed to or concerned about her reform work suggests that she saw herself as liberal, possibly radical, and she also repeatedly identifies herself as modern. She was one of those women Lori Ginzberg describes, who were encouraged by post-Civil War liberalism to set new standards for behavior and values, standards that insisted on engagement with charity and social change (209). Although reforming the world was part of her liberal worldview, because she was Christian and subscribed to the Social Gospel, Phelps must also have believed that this work was both necessary and beneficial for this life and the afterlife. As Susan Curtis points out, the Social Gospel obliged people to enact "social and political reforms designed to eliminate poverty, disease, filth, and immorality" (2). Of the hundred or so essays that Phelps published, more than ninety were about reforming some aspect of her society. Most of her fiction deals with reform imperatives: some narratives are explicitly about fixing the world; others engage more obliquely. In all cases, she was both personally and intellectually invested. The plight of the wives and children of drunkards in Gloucester, Massachusetts, where Phelps summered, inspired her to join the temperance movement and write temperance into

essays and fiction. Her continued attention to the plight of the working poor led her to research the subject, and she cites the *Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics of Labor Reports* in her popular 1872 novel *The Silent Partner*. Twice, Phelps, a woman who disliked speaking in public, gave anti-vivisection addresses to the Massachusetts State Legislature because she loved animals and believed the practice to be inhuman and unwarranted as a scientific practice. Quite frequently, Phelps created narratives that combined in fiction the many reform agenda she combined in her life. For example, the second Gates novel, *Beyond the Gates* (1883), while largely about the heaven that its protagonist encounters in her near-death experience, details the reform work that she undertook in her life; like Phelps, she worked for temperance, labor reform, changes to the penal system, and suffrage and other women's rights issues.

In the stories that follow, multiple calls for social or economic justice come through, as do calls for the rights of workers, animals, women, and children. "Blythe," for example, may describe the story of a working girl who desperately needs reforms to labor practices to make her life better, but the story also suggests the needs for health care and life insurance. While "My Story" critiques the laws governing women's legal and property rights, it also looks at health care and cultural ideals about appropriate work for women. The veteran who narrates "Not a Pleasant Story" may be teaching readers about temperance and addiction, but he also calls into question his government's callousness towards Civil War veterans. "Tammyshanty" is one of Phelps's anti-vivisection stories, but it also considers how the wider society treated orphans and how orphaned boys gained some autonomy and control through newsboy associations. Resistance to dominant and oppressive social trends runs through these stories as it runs through Phelps's work. "Tammyshanty" offers figures who resist unequal access to education, and unequal labor practices, and who resist the powerful discourse of science. The story calls into question what makes a citizen even as it interrogates the rights and roles of animals in society. The feisty woman who tells "My Story" resists both explicit legal constraints and the social codes that dictate her feminine role. The veteran resists judgments about his wife and his life as he tells a story that turns out fairly pleasant after all. And Blythe, while seeming fully passive and unresisting, is imaginatively aware of that "other girl" who has a much more fulfilling life, and thus resists her own.

## THE STORIES

"Blythe" appeared in *Watchman and Reflector* 17 Oct. 1867: 8.

"My Story" was published in *Congregationalist* 22 June 1871: 199.

"Not a Pleasant Story" appeared in *Scribner's Magazine* 3 (Nov. 1871): 98-105.

“Tammyshanty” first appeared in *Woman’s Home Companion* 35 (Oct. 1908): 7-9; it was reprinted in *The Oath of Allegiance and Other Stories*. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1909).

## BLYTHE

She passes the house every day. Sometimes you see her; more often not. Yet you know whom I mean, I think. "One of the factory-girls." She stands thus labelled and ticketed in your thought. She wore a brown veil; or you noticed her eyes, as you sat with your crochet-work in the bow-window. There the thought has stopped. You would like to hear a little about her?

There are so many of these girls. Blythe is like the rest; neither better nor worse; neither more interesting nor less; no heroine; no heiress or genius in disguise; just a plain, hard-working, hard-worked little Scotch girl; nothing romantic, or at all out of the way about her; which is the best of reasons for talking about her awhile.

Scotch? O yes; Blythe is quite positive on that point. Born upon the banks of your blue Merrimac, it is the very pertinacity of the Yankee in her, which clings so to the old birthright of which her mother tells her in long winter-night stories—her mother, who has seen the queen, and the heather, and the hills, and used to wear blue ribbons on her hair like Highland Mary. Ah, to think of mother in those days!

Blythe wears blue ribbons, too, on Sunday. One would think that she should always wear blue ribbons. They, and the large, full, fair face, with its pallid hair and grave blue eyes, suit, like tints in a well-toned picture. Look at her face more attentively, as she goes by this noon. It might be pretty, were it a well, healthily-colored face, used to fresh and wholesome conditions of air and temperature. It is a merry enough face at times, being a girl's, but inexpectant when in repose, with a sad mouth. One is not apt to find other than sad mouths—did you ever notice it?—in a factory.

Blythe's mother is her practical world, no less now at eighteen than at eight. She praises her, scolds her, pets her, controls her, buys her dresses, and takes her wages every Saturday night, precisely as she would with Mary and Jane Maria, who are dressing paper dolls upon the door-step. If Blythe ever wearies a bit over this, she does not say so. It may perhaps work in with that undercurrent of dull longing for a home of her own, which winds through the days of all girls, coming as she has come, to the place "where the brook and river meet;" but it is a state of affairs against which she would never think, nor would she desire, to rebel.<sup>98</sup> "It is the way with us Scotch folks," she would say, smiling, "mother couldn't get along any other way. It's all right." Were there a man at home, some things might be different, times easier, work not so hard, possibly a little schooling in prospect. Blythe just remembers her father dying there in the little close room, with the bed rolled up to the window: his face, his kiss, and his last words about "being a good girl and not being out nights." She would tell you—did you win her to the telling—a little about those dying days. Their memory makes the girl move her lips hungrily. Diligent people never suffer for food in America did you say? Ask Blythe.

"There were six of us, you know, besides father and mother, and nobody but me and Jane Maria to work. Mother, she used to plan and plan to get things for father. We used to go without meat in those days. He needed it most, you know. I used to come home at noon and smell it cooking. I never had any. Davie climbed upon a chair by the stove one day—Davie was the baby, you know—and watched it. He began to cry by-and-by. 'Davie wants some of papa's

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<sup>98</sup> Phelps quotes from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "Maidenhood," which appeared in *Ballads and Other Poems* in 1841. The poem is about adolescent transition from girl to maiden to woman and the triplet from which Phelps quotes is central to Longfellow's theme: "Standing, with reluctant feet, / Where the brook and the river meet, / Womanhood and childhood fleet!"



beef,’ says he, ‘Davie’ll be a good boy.’ ‘No,’ she told him, ‘Davie couldn’t have any of that beef,’ and she hushed him up quick. But father heard. He pushed the plate away that noon and couldn’t eat. Mother, she cried that day.

“Afterwards, when Davie died, she used to talk about it. It made her feel bad. ‘Mamma,’ Davie used to say, ‘wasn’t God naughty to take away my papa?’ ‘No,’ she told him, ‘God was good. God was always good.’”

She might tell you, too, how she learned her last lesson at school—she then twelve years old—how she shut the arithmetic in the sad afternoon light and put it away; how she went in among the wheels and the dust the next morning; how early and drearily life began to be life.

There she has been among the wheels and the dust from then till now. There she will be—ah, well, how long? God knows what is coming to her, god knows!—she says to herself sometimes, when the tears come hot and quick.

The words are as much a prayer, I think, as a cry. Strictly and theologically speaking, Blythe does not often pray. She “does not know how,” she would bashfully exclaim. It might not be difficult to teach her how, with such teaching as she needs, which, by the way, is other than that of the pulpit or the inquiry-room. Pulpit and inquiry-rooms answer their purpose, but are not the alpha and omega of religious culture.

She is not strong, you mark. Her physical condition, or want of condition, would make her fortune at Saratoga.<sup>99</sup> The circles under her eyes are heavy and habitual. Something is said about “a cough” which comes with the winter and stays till the spring. She never complains; but were she kindly asked, would answer that she “is tired all the time,” and turn away that one might not see her eyelids quiver. Let us stand with her eleven hours at her looms, and wonder if we can. Do something else? What? How? What can she who has handled gearings since she was twelve years old know about any thing else? Where can any be found to teach her? How can an obscure, “unrecommended” girl her way into the clerkship, the kitchen, the nursery, which it is so easy to suggest for her benefit?

No, Blythe must stay where she is. Let us see about what that means.

The dreary twang of the factory-bell wakens her at “five o’clock in the morning.” That is pretty work for the milkmaid in the song, with the dew-laden fields, and the fence, and the lover, and all the rest of it made to order. It might happen once a summer to you or me—intent on a mountain top, and lemonade and Tennyson—and be a delight. It is another thing to Blythe.

Blythe is neat of habit, and she loathes the sight and touch of the dirty brown factory-dress—a factory dress can be nothing else—which hangs waiting for her over a chair. She protests inwardly, by her vehement ablutions at the sink, and scolds Jane Maria sharply—sorry for it the next minute—for standing in her way. She helps about the children and the kitchen fire, finds out that her mother is a little cross, and tries not to notice it, hurriedly swallows her breakfast, (of bread and molasses) and starts with the second bell for her work at a quarter of six. It is yet early, fresh and cool. But Blythe has learned how many burning July suns are fresh and cool at six o’clock, and she wonders, with a sinking heart, how much over a hundred the thermometer will stand by noon.

Up two, three, four—last winter it was five flights of stairs—she climbs faintly, and into the lint, the oil, the dirt, the noise, the whirr, the sickening smells, the burning heats. She wonders, in a vague way, standing at her looms in air scalded by jets of steam, what it must be

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<sup>99</sup> Phelps suggests that Blythe’s fragile health is connected to tuberculosis. Saratoga Springs in New York State had been popular as a health spa since early in the century.

## Blythe

like, that life should mean any thing else than oil, and dirt, and noise, and whirr, and heat. No leisure for Blythe this burning day; no slackened work, to rest and cool. A careless touch, and those iron joints would wrench her nimble fingers from the socket. An unwary toss of dress or hair, and—well Blythe remembers the little Irish girl just across the room last winter, crushed and ground there in her sight. Pleasant thoughts to have on such a day, when one's hands will tremble, and one's sight is dim with weary weakness!

One hundred and seven the thermometer points at noon. Blythe worked over engines one summer, whose July temperature was just one hundred and twenty.

Home again in the hour's nooning to dine and wash. There is time for little else than dining and washing. The tenement there in the close alley by the blazing river, the dinner-table by the kitchen-fire, do not offer facilities for cooling. She looks, as she passes back to her work, in through the closed blinds and windows of your parlor, and dimly sees you on your afghan with your novel, in the cool, and dark, and greenness. Her eyes darken and brim over. Poor Blythe!

Back again when the glare of the afternoon has faded,—very tired now; tired through and through her, body, and brain, and heart. She takes another picture of you, (how little you are thinking of it!) out on the croquet-ground, in muslin and pink ribbons, your laugh ringing out, your fresh, untired, happy face full in her sight. It is not one's fault, to be sure, that one is fresh and happy, and can play croquet and sit in a cool parlor. Blythe has the sense to see that. Her heart has neither blame nor bitterness in it. She only takes the merry picture away to the alley with her, and she only cries out in her dull, old, stifled way,—

“There is this other girl. Here am I.”

And not once, but many times,—

“There is this other girl, O God! and here am I.”

Her feet drag by the time they reach her alley. The red sun is sinking hotly behind the red river. The growing cool has scarcely touched the close, unwholesome place. Groups of men with bad tobacco befoul whatever freshness there might be. Children, tired and cross, swarm and quarrel every where. In the house her mother, but just home from a day's cleaning up-town, is likewise tired and cross, poor soul! Supper is not ready. Mary has been pulling Jane Maria's hair, and both are crying.

Blythe turns away sick at heart. She keeps her temper, perhaps; or perhaps she does not. She is glad to hurry out as soon as she can; to the steps or the street. There are two or three hours now before bed-time; Blythe's only hours; golden hours, perhaps, to you, of starlight, and moonlight, and song, and dreaming. What to Blythe?

There may be sewing or there may be cleaning. Last Friday the girl scrubbed the kitchen floor upon her knees after her long day's work, thinking her mother more weary than herself. O, little Blythe! I doubt not you will hear of that kitchen floor on some other summer night in some happier life than this.

She may read a little, perhaps; but Blythe is apt to be too tired to read. Or the library book is uninteresting; and a *Ledger* or a *Chimney Corner* takes its place.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> The *New York Ledger*, first published by Robert Bonner in 1855, was one of the earliest and most successful of the highly popular storypapers of the period. Storypapers were also called "six-cent weeklies" and featured an array of serialized stories, poems, humor, fashion, and current events intended for the entire family. They catered to a predominantly female readership and serialized stories focussed heavily on romance (domestic and historical). Frank Leslie published *The Chimney Corner*, another inexpensive storypaper, from 1865 to 1885.

It grows dark, and the girls come by—or the boys—and Blythe slips naturally away from her doorstep into the pleasures and the dangers of the stirring, bright street, where the wind blows cool, and where one can forget, for a while, in clean calico and becoming hat, that one must go to work to-morrow.

So back again at nine o'clock to the alley, and mother, and sleep—to wonder before she dreams, if one day will always be like another day, one year like another year, one life so unlike another life—and then it is five o'clock again, and the endless bell is in her ears, and the old, hot, unwelcome morning in her eyes.

Now, were there any to draw from her the story of her wearisome days; to sorrow with her over their pain, and point out to her their blessing and their tempting; to help her over their rough places, and to bid her trust God and take courage, in such ways Blythe can be helped and bidden!—but there is none such. Perhaps there cannot be. I simply say that there is not. Blythe has a pastor, a kind one, but he is not—probably he could not be—just that to her. A teacher, too, at the Sabbath school,—a good teacher, a prayerful teacher; Blythe respects her, learns her lessons to please her, goes away and forgets both them and her. Neither teacher, nor pastor, nor friend has there ever been to draw aside the veil that enfolds this girl's simple inner life.

Sunday is Blythe's almost happy day. To hear no five o'clock clash of bells; to dream till six, if one likes; to throw the dirty brown skirt into the wash; to have the whole long day before one to stroll away among the pine trees and the swamps where the lady-slippers grow; to put on one's new lawn, and white lisle-thread gloves, and little tulle bonnet, and sit at ease among well-dressed people in the hush of a church; to feel for one day of the whole week that one looks “as well as anybody”—ah, who would not be almost happy?

But Sunday night comes fast, and the shadow of the Monday darkens the little gleam before it has fairly had the chance to gild and warm Blythe's open heart.

There are more things than the tale of work-days and rest-day that Blythe might say to that unfound friend, did their lives ever meet and cross. Has she not her little love story hidden away in its silence? Most girls have. Poor little story! He is going to marry somebody else. That is all. Very simple and very sad, like the girl's own life. How soon, or if ever, she will read it through, is little to the point. It bounds her horizon now. Through mill-hours and through home-hours, it runs, a fine, faint pain. Were there some hand—a woman's hand—to steal into hers some night at twilight and ask for this story, too—well, you may smile; but believe me, that is not always the best kind of “missionary labor” which ignores the existence of love stories.

Blythe may be a bit of a Christian in her way, perhaps, after all; that little circumstance about her prayers notwithstanding; but it is a very small, uncomforted way. It does not occur to her hopeless thought that heaven may ever be meant for her. This world is meant for her, apparently; this world, with its treadmill days, its tired nights, its lifeless past, its more lifeless future. Being in it, she tries, I think, in her quiet fashion, “to be a good girl;” does not mean to be cross to mother, or to scold the children; chooses “good company” when she is not tempted over much—being tempted over much sometimes, as well as Launcelot or another—would like not to be discontented, and “guesses” in her secret heart “that God knows better than she does.” A poor little creed, to be sure; but it might be worse. It might be better, too;—quite right.

A dwarfed, bleak life this life of Blythe's. One is sorry for her. One would like to help her. What can we do for her? Any thing? None is the judge of another; but what can we do? Think of her, at least, a little; if nothing else, pray for her much.

## MY STORY

Hiram came in and unbuttoned his overcoat, and hung it up without speaking.

There was always something prosy about Hiram and me. I suppose there always will be. It's in us, both of us. I don't know that we should ever have got married, if it hadn't been—it is such a prosy thing to be married about here.

You go right along, you know. You see so little of anything but each other, and the quarter's bills, and measles, and Thursday evening meeting.

You don't read much poetry, and you don't see much company, and it isn't often there's a concert, and it isn't once a year you read a novel, and that is when you have the influenza, and I don't think, all things considered, that anything is quite so prosy as a novel and an influenza taken together.

But on the whole I'm not sorry about it. I don't think we should have been any happier if we'd been the other kind of people; for, I often tell Hiram there is another kind of people, after all.

“Is there?” he says, “Well I don't know, Paulette.”

And I don't suppose he does. And so we jog along.

Happy?

I'm not used to writing for newspapers. I never tried to do such a thing before in all my life; and when you ask me if we're happy, if Hiram and I are happy, I declare I don't know what to say!

Happy?

I believe that I never have stopped to think, since I was married, whether I was happy or not. I used to think a great deal about it, before. All girls do—cry about it nights when they're not too sleepy. Since I've been married, I have not the time to think about that nor anything.

Now that it comes up, it seems such a ridiculous question! Hiram and I happy? I should like to know what business a man and his wife have to be anything else! Of course Hiram and I are happy.

Of course, at least we were that evening when he came in and unbuttoned his overcoat and hung it up before he spoke; generally he spoke; just in latching the door: “There, Paulette?” or, “How's the baby?” or, at least, what a cold night it was!

Now that was what made me say that Hiram and I were prosy. Some people would have gone off like a needle-gun if they'd had what Hiram had to say. Hiram just unbuttoned those buttons, six of them, slowly, and he hung his coat up by the loop, and took off his woolen comforter.

Then he came to the fire, and then I saw how white he was, and then I felt myself turn sick and faint in my chair.

I was holding the baby, and I couldn't jump. And if I pushed him down he would have cried at the top of his lungs for an hour. So I ran and emptied the sugar-bowl out on the dining-room table, and sat him down there, and the children came running in, and I shut them all in, like flies into a molasses jug, and went back and got down on my knees by Hiram.

“You've had another!” said I, and I said it fast and hot.

“Yes,” said Hiram; but he said it slowly.

“Worse?”

“The worst one yet. I was helping about a barrel. Don't worry, Paulette; I've got over it now, it was three hours back. I was only pushing a little at the barrel.”

“Dincks shouldn’t have let you!” said I.

“Dincks wasn’t in,” said he. “He’d just run over to the office. The boy couldn’t do it alone. It was flour. I choked and fell, I think. It wasn’t so much the bleeding as the faint. They took me into the counting-room, and I lay across two chairs till I got over it. I’m quite over it, now, Paulette. My lung isn’t very sore. I wish, Paulette, that you wouldn’t—”

And there, before my eyes, he choked and dropped again.

Well, I got him to bed. He wouldn’t listen to a doctor. We couldn’t afford it, he said, and we couldn’t. And what could he do! he said, and what could he? So I got him to bed myself, and I declare I couldn’t tell you which worried me most, for an hour on, that Hiram was going into consumption, or what a colic those children were getting over the sugar-bowl! But that, I suppose, was because I am prosy. Four children with colic, to a prosy person, seems at the time of it so much worse than anything else that can possibly happen.

By one o’clock he was over it. He slept, I think, and had a cup of tea, and roused, quite bright and strong. So he sat up in bed, and finished his sentence:

“—Wouldn’t worry,” said he, beginning where he left off.

“Dear me!” said I, for he frightened me.

I came and sat down on the edge of the bed. I was tired enough to drop, and worried enough to cry.

“Don’t!” said he.

“I don’t mean to,” said I.

“No,” said he, “I know you don’t.” And then he lay back again upon the pillow.

“Hiram,” said I, “It might just as well come now, as any other time.”

“Just as well,” said Hiram.

“It’s better than to worry along so.”

“A great deal better,” said Hiram.

“You must tell Dincks to-morrow.”

“I shall,” said he, “I’ll dissolve partnership this week.”

“Then go to sleep this minute!” said I.

“I would,” said Hiram, “if I knew who was going to support the family.”

“I’ll support the family,” said I. For who could if I couldn’t?

“I’ll support the family, if you’ll only go to sleep.”

“Very well,” said Hiram; and I don’t suppose he had the least doubt of it. So he turned over and went to sleep.

Hiram went to sleep; but I didn’t. The children cried till three. From three to six, I sat up in the rocking-chair, to think. There was just so much thinking to do, you see, and I can’t think very well unless the house is still—perhaps I don’t think often enough to know how—and it’s never still at our house except when all the children are asleep. So I sat in the rocking-chair till six; and at six, it was time to build the fires.

By that time, I had it settled. Hiram saw as much when he waked and looked around. I think Hiram always had a good deal of confidence in me if there was anything to be settled; and that’s more than you can say of most men; at any rate, if a man’s wife can make good muffins and doctor the children through whooping-cough, he doesn’t generally expect much more of her; at least that’s the way with men about here. But my husband is different.

After breakfast—(he ate a little gruel himself, while I crumbed up the children’s milk)—after breakfast, he says:

“Well, Paulette?”

## My Story

And I said, "I've got it, Hiram."

"I'm very glad," said he, with a dreadfully worried sigh; he looked most too worried to be very glad. He asked me to sit up on the bed and tell him all about it, and to send the children off—so I knew how worried he must have been. So I sat up on the bed and I told him my plan, for I'd got it very clear to myself, between three and six, and it didn't take a half a minute.

"Hiram," said I, "I can't teach."

"No," said Hiram, "I don't think you could."

"Even if Sarah Pratt hadn't the district, for a year to come; and her mother blind; and her father with that leg."

"Yes," said Hiram.

"And plain sewing wouldn't earn our salt."

"I don't see how it could," said Hiram. "There are so many of us. It never did seem to me before, Paulette, as if there were so many."

"It never did to me," said I. "And now," said I, "I'll tell you how I've got it. I'm going to take the business."

"The what?" said he.

"The business," said I.

"Whose?" said he.

"Yours!" said I.

"Well I never!" said he.

"Of course you never," said I, "you never had the chance to."

"But W. I.," said Hiram. "If it had been dry goods without W. I.!"

"As if I couldn't manage all the W. I. groceries there are in that store!" said I.

"Why yes," said Hiram, "as if you couldn't! Well, I never!" said he.

"But Dincks wouldn't have another clerk," said Hiram, "you couldn't make him put up with the putter of more than one clerk round, if it were to save his soul. Dincks is set."

"Dincks is sensible," said I, "and so am I. Do you think, I should like to know, that I'm going to support the family from being any of Dincks's clerks?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," said Hiram, "what you're going to do."

"I'm going into partnership, to be sure," said I.

"You're not, though," said Hiram. Then he raised himself upon his elbow, and began to look as bright!

"I'm going into partnership," said I, "in dry goods and groceries with Frank Dincks. I'm going to buy you out, (I can borrow you out at least) and pay you any interest you'll name."

(It was the first time Hiram had laughed since the attack came on.)

"But," said he, "I believe a business contract between husband and wife won't hold. It seems to me a wife can't legally make a contract anyhow; something like it; what of that, now?"

"You can make your wife a present, I suppose?" said I.

"Of all I'm worth? Why yes. That will do. What else Paulette! I guess we could get over that. What else?"

"Then," said I, "I'm going to add that five hundred of mine that father gave me."

"No, you're not!" said Hiram, "I won't touch that."

"Nobody wants you to touch it," said I. "I'm going to add that five hundred if Dincks needs to be bought over. In fact I don't know but I shall any way. The shop needs an entrance on South Street, and the candy ought to be Southmayd's, every stick of it, and the balmorals Frank Dincks gets are enough to scare trade clear the other side of the river! Now Hiram!"

“Oh, dear me, Paulette!” said Hiram.

“Of course it’s dear you,” said I, “or I shouldn’t be doing it. Now Hiram, I understand dry goods and groceries, don’t I?”

“You’ve always understood everything I’ve understood,” said Hiram.

Hiram is an honest man.

“And I can make money on it, can’t I?”

“Of course you can,” said Hiram.

“Then I’m going to do it,” said I.

“But you’ll get molasses on your dress! Oh, dear me,” said Hiram.

“As if I never got molasses on my dress at home!” said I. “I’m going to see Dincks this minute;” and I got up and put on my bonnet.

Hiram never said a word, and he looked as pleased.

I’d got my bonnet on and got to the door. Then I stopped. There was one thing he hadn’t thought of, and I couldn’t go without its coming up, and I couldn’t seem to bring it up. He was lying with his eyes shut,—as pale as chalk—and smiling to himself.

“Well Paulette?” for he saw I waited round.

“I suppose you see”—

“That I’ve got to be housekeeper? oh, yes, I saw that at the first. When I get up from this, I can manage very well. It’s not like lifting hogsheads. I’ll see to that. Don’t you mind that.”

But I did mind it. I couldn’t help it. To see him lie so patiently, and take it in—for I knew he took it in. To wash the dishes, and run after the children, and set the table, and chop the hash, and do all the little fussy, fretty, worrying woman’s jobs! After being brought up to be a man! If he hadn’t been brought up, it wouldn’t have seemed so, for it’s bringing up that makes the difference to my mind, and I declare I minded it a minute, I couldn’t help it, till Hiram called me back and kissed me.

“My dear,” said he, “you’ve done it all your life for me. If I’ve lost the power to go to the store, and you’ve got it, I hope I’m man enough, Paulette, to be a good housekeeper. Now run and see Dincks as quick as you can! You’re such a hand to settle things, Paulette!”

Now, how many men do you know would have done that? I never saw another one. I don’t think there is another man in the world like Hiram.

“We’ll get you well between us!” said I, half crying and half laughing too, “and if I do pretty well, we’ll hire Mary Smith, and you shall go off somewhere and board a fortnight in a four-dollar-a-day hotel for a change! Or perhaps the mountains, Hiram, in our old buggy, with Mr. Perkins’s Jim!”

And with that, I was off to the store, and Hiram’s face went with me, with such a “settled” look, it makes me wicked to think back and remember now. Now I’d known Frank Dincks ever since I was a baby. I saved him from drowning once on the mill-pond, and I beat him at the skating-match in fifty-nine. Dincks was the last man to make me trouble.

“It’s an idea,” said he. He was sitting on a flour barrel with his feet on the counter, when I went in to tell him. “It’s not a bad idea,”—he took down his feet. “Some people would think it wasn’t woman’s sphere, but I don’t make so much of that against the smash-up of the firm. It’s too old a firm. I’ll think about it, and come over to-night. Tell Hiram not to worry. I’d as lief’s have you as him as far as I know, any day. I’ll be over this evening, tell him.”

Now what do you think Dincks had to say when he came over that very evening, Hiram and I sitting so bright and happy talking the new plans over in the dark?

## My Story

You'd never guess it I know, nor would I, and I've lived in Massachusetts all my life. Dincks never did himself, till that very night. Minute he came in, I knew something was wrong.

"It's a shame, I declare," said he; he sat down while I lighted up, and he looked at Hiram in a worried sort of way.

"Fact is, it can't be done!" said Dincks.

"I should like to know why not!" said I. I was so disappointed, and taken all aback, I declare, I set the baby on the table, and put the lamp into the crib, and tucked it up.

"The laws of the State of Massachusetts forbid it," said Frank Dincks, "I've been over to see Bean about it. It's a fact. A married woman cannot carry on business in partnership with any one. That's one of the improvements our Legislatures make in these days. There isn't a crook nor a corner by which we could get you in, and Bean tried his best for half an hour. You couldn't be my partner with nor without your husband's consent. I declare it is too bad," said Dincks.

"I'll get a divorce!" said I, for I was hot and angry.

"Well, well," said Hiram, "we must think of something else."

But we both could see how hard he took it. Frank Dincks got up and went away.

"Oh Hiram!" said I, when he'd shut the door, "I wish you hadn't married a woman!"

"Well, well, well," said Hiram, tired half to death, and coughing too, "it can't be helped."

I suppose he meant the laws.

That was a year ago. We've never thought of anything else. We're living on our principal—yes, of course; and what there'll be left to live on soon, wouldn't board a chicken, I can tell you. I never saw a man so changed, and worn, and worried out in one year's time, as Hiram Bent is. Giving up that shop, and fretting for those children, are rasping him to death. I'm so downhearted and disheartened myself, that I declare, I don't know how to pull along. Hiram's lung is in a dreadful state. We're most worn out, and it doesn't seem as if we saw an inch ahead, or ever should.

It can't be helped. Can't it? We sent to Boston to a lawyer with a bigger name than Bean. He said it couldn't. Well, I don't know. If that's the kind of laws that men have made for women, I don't know about it's not being helped. Nor Hiram either.

I never thought to live to see the day when I should say: Shame to the Old Bay State! But I write it down, and I write it down again. Shame on the Old Bay State, for the laws its men have made!

And I could have told you in the first place, when you asked me for a story, (I'm such a prosy person), that that was all I had to say.



## NOT A PLEASANT STORY: BEING PASSAGES FROM THE PRIVATE HISTORY OF A PUBLIC NUISANCE.

Since you've been so good, sir, thank you. It's not over-often I get the chance. I like the Common too. It isn't so much the grass, nor it isn't the gravel, nor the water-spirits. It's the elbow-room. Why, when you come to see the world, as I did down to Virginy, then plump down in this town, leastways my parts of it, for a lifetime, sir, if there's any one thing more than any other thing a man's conscious of, it's elbows. Though maybe I might be taken a bit sensitive on that point, natural. It's the singular number that's the rough of life, to my thinking.

How did I lose the arm? One question to once, *if* you please, sir. I'm an aging man, and easy put awry in my mind in conversation. You'll remember that you settled for a morning's job,—very generous, sir,—and brought me here in the character of a Public Nuisance. Begging your pardon, maybe you didn't use them language exact: "How now?" says you; "shut up that instrument and come to the Common with me, and tell me, in Heaven's name, what you grind it for." That's all you says; but I see it in your eyes you'd take no grudge to see me shut up in it, and ground out of the way myself. No offense, sir. I'm used to't. Hear it off and on every day: "Public nuisance!" sometimes quite loud and meant for me to hear, and again soft-like and dainty, from gals in white fur wraps, and leaving little puffs of sweet smells along behind 'em. Sometimes from folks that pay me someat too, dropping in occasional a piece of currency, which isn't frequent, with their eyes looking straight ahead, as they didn't mean to see themselves caught in the act, with twitches about the mouth. Soldiers' friends, I take it. There's generally Andersonville or someat like that's to pay, there. Then there's 'tother kind that stops and says, "What's your tax-report?" says they, meaning, I make it, to mock me for a rich beggar, which Heaven knows isn't so agree'ble for an okkypation as to make it likely. I won't say but organ-grinders and easy cash (folks has said, wicked cash) have seen each other's faces, since that's the talk, and I'm not over-much acquainted in the trade myself personal. All is, fur's my experience goes, it's a g-r-i-n-d-i-n-g slow trade.

Blithe thinks so too. Blithe is smart to see pints of a thing. She'll talk betimes of setting me up in the candy line, but molasses is proper dear, and there is the sinking of the instrument, which we've got a mortgage on the cook-stove for, in which case, you see, you'd be under some difficulties in respect to boiling down of your stock in trade.

Blithe is my little gal.

Did you ever go out oyster-dredgin', sir? No? Well, you'd ought to. That's a line of business very well to take in a fancy way, say for an afternoon. I can't say as I'd recommend it from a perpetooal point of view. I owned an oyster-boat once.

That was nine—ten—that was eleven years ago. Now it seems to me every day of twenty-five. I wasn't a young man when I married; and if I was put to't to choose, sir, for aging, between merridge and rheumatism, I'd take my chance on rheumatiz any day. There's that peccolarity about merridge to my mind.

Yes, sir, it was just eleven years ago this year I left the oyster-boat. This was the way of it.

There's times I think I'd like to go back. I declare I do. There's advantages about an oyster-boat, more especial when you come to live in it, as I did. I lived in my boat three years. She was nothing for craft, you know, a low-necked, clumsy creetur, with her cabin so small you had to go out to turn round in it; and a habit of taking fire in her middle whenever I broiled sarsingers. She did that reg'lar on sarsinger day, from the week I boarded till the week I cleared

## Not a Pleasant Story

her. But I never laid it up agin her very much, for she was a water-tight, warm-ribbed, sensible kind of hulk, who understood her business, and held her anchor in a high tide anywheres down the flats you'd a mind to try her.

A lonesome way of life? Maybe. On the whole I don't know but it was. Seems so now. Seemed so then. But bless you! there's been times, a looking back on't, when it was a Paradise to think on. Sir, there was never a Paradise without its swoird o' flames turning which way and what. If so be that the lay of it runs in a dredging-boat, turn your back on Paradise, and you've seen the last on't.<sup>101</sup> You can't crawl in, nor you can't creep under, nor you can't hist over, nor you can't peek round. You've seen the end on't. Make your blunder and stick to't. Go your ways and bide by 'em. Hold your tongue, and heft up your heart, and work in the sweat of your brow, and keep your mind to yourself, sir, but never go sneaking back to beg into a garding as you've trod the flowers on, and shut the gate on, and shook the dust from your feet upon, of your own free will and pleasure.

Not to say that a dredging-boat is so much like a garding as may be, but a cosy place, more especial in a storm, a oyster-boat is. What with a pipe, and the fleck of fire in the cook-stove, and your dreadnought hanging on the wall, and the cat—I kept a cat. Her name was Venus die Medicine; oncommon name for a cat, I thought; I got her from a house-and-sign painter who drowned himself, with a wife and nine small children, owing, they thought, to a sunstroke of a July day. So what with the cat a cleaning of the spider for you with her clean pink tongue (I washed it arterwards when I wasn't too busy), and the shade and warmness along in the corners of the cabin, and the stoopid, sleepy swashin to the boat.<sup>102</sup> Considerin, too, that you hadn't hasped the cabin door, and that the tide splashed in, dropping down, and that the cat would leave the sarsinger dish to run and lick the drops up. Considerin a lurch to the old hulk now and then, heels over head like a tipsy log, and viewin the wind from a cheerful point.

I think, sir, I must be of a curious turn of mind. It used to trouble me now a great deal, in that boat, about the oysters. Not the dredging, by no means, for what would be the sense in being a oyster, if you *wasn't* dredged? It must be a great satisfaction, it seems to me, *being* a oyster, to live under a dredging-boat. But what, now, *is* the sense of being a oyster? If the Almighty made one set of living creeturs for no purpose nor no reason under the canopy of Heaven but to slip easy down another set of living creeturs' throats—but there, I've lost it; I had it once as slick as a whistle. I most forget the way it went. But it was a curious turn of mind, and made either me or the Almighty a sight of trouble; I don't clearly remember which.

Well, it come one night of a December. It was an ugly night, too; you don't often see an uglier, in a dredging-boat. It sleeted thick, and blew. It was dark as a pocket. My pipe got out and my fire got down, and it got wet and spattery below; and lonesome—well, yes; oncommon so. I'd come upon deck, and stuck myself into the storm for company; I was setting half over the gun'ale, looking down.

I was setting on the gun'ale, looking down, I know; for the tide was at the turn, and I was wondering about the oysters and how they took it in their minds of a stormy night; and considering the look of the town against the sleet. Ever notice it? Off the oyster-beds there, it

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<sup>101</sup>The sword of Paradise refers to the flaming sword in Genesis 3:24, which is used to guard the tree of life. The narrator reflects on the lonely Paradise he left behind, recognizing that he cannot return to it.

<sup>102</sup> A spider is a kind of frying pan with legs and a long handle.

spattered about, you might say, like the broken pieces of a great gilt chiny cup. Of a clear night, it winked.

How did it happen? The dark, I suppose, or the blow and noise, or all together but I never saw nor heard it till it came thud! against the boat's shoulder, me setting over the gun'ale there, and the sleet in my face and ears.

I'd rather the thing would have gone to hell than to have touched it; I jumped and said so, screechin.

Yet there's my arms up to the shoulder-blades in water after it, next minute. Maybe you can explain that, sir. I can't.

It slipped from me like an eel, sir; it squirmed and screwed; it wriggled in under the slimy boat. I never had hands on a uglier thing.

“I hope to God it's a puppy!” says I.

Well, sir, it wasn't; not to say that I haven't wished it had been, since; more than once I've wished it had been a stark dead puppy before ever I went over the gun'ale after it.

“I hope it may be a puppy!” says I. And that living minute there squirms through my fingers a great swash of limpsy, long hair.

With that I has it up on deck before you could say Jack Robinson, head foremost. It lies as stiff as a bowsprit. The cat comes up, fore-paws on the hatchway, and she puts up her back and spits at it.

“Venus,” says I, “we've got a dead woman aboard!”

And I went as cold as a frog, sir.

Howsomever, I got the body below, best way I could, by the fire.

It lay very pretty for a dead woman. I really wish you could have seen it. Her hair was down her back, and her clothes—she wore a red calico dress—had frozen to her.

I did the best I could, sir, being as there were no women-folks but Venus aboard. I blowed up the fire, and I blowed out the light, and I got her out of her sloppy clothes and under a blanket, and the dreadnaught, and this and that, as if she'd been my mother; and I rubbed her feet, and Venus she licked her about the face and arms, and between us and a sip of brandy and camphire that I put aboard in cholera times, we did it.

Yes, we brought her round, sir, sure as life.

She set up very pretty for a live woman, too; she was all of a heap in my great-coat; and her hair began to dry; I can remember to this day thinking how exactly it was the color of a good middlin'-sized gold-fish, when I'd lighted up again, and see her setting there, in my dreadnaught, by the cabin fire.

Sir, she set up very pretty, very pretty. She was a youngish woman. It seemed a curious thing to me to see a woman in the cabin.

I can't say accurate which began it, nor how we got to it, but in fifteen minutes or thereabouts it was as good as done.

“Where did you come from?” said I; I remember saying that. She had just drunk the last of the cholera mixter, and put the bottle down behind the stove.

“From the devil,” says she.

“What was you about in the water?” said I.

“Going to the devil,” says she.

“You'd pretty nigh got there,” said I, “when you hit *this* boat.”

## Not a Pleasant Story

With that she sighs and lays her head agin her hand. "I've tried it three times," says she. "Twice it was police, and once it was a ferry-boat, and now it's you," says she. "I'm most discouraged," says she.

"And where be you going *now*?" said I.

"To the devil," says she, just the same, with her head upon her hand. "There's nowhere else to go," says she.

Now, being a lonesome man who hadn't had a woman in his oyster boat for three years, that made me feel kind of bad. I don't know why, neither.

I remember getting up to walk the cabin, and stepping on the cat, to think how bad I felt.

As I tell you, fifteen minutes, and it was all done. I'd been a rough man, and a restless and a solitary, and I hadn't done a useful thing by my kind before, I couldn't remember when; and so it came over me: Why not? Here was this poor young creetur, and here was me; I could pay the parson, and she could broil the sarsingers; why not?

"Suppose," said I to the young woman, "that you married me, instead?"

"Instead of what?" says she, starting round.

"Instead of going where you was mentioning," said I. The young woman looked at me, I can tell you, pretty sharp. Pretty soon she runs her hands through her long hair, and then she takes a lock of it, and draws it once or twice across her eyes.

"It would be a chance," said she. "I never had much chance," said she. And I tell you, she set up very pretty, drawing her hair across her eyes.

"You'd ought to know," says she.

"No, I'd oughtn't," says I. "I don't want to know nothing about you. If so be that you're my true and honest wife, I don't want to know. You've asked me no questions, and I'll ask you no more. It ain't much I can say for myself," said I, "but I reckon I can do a peg better by you than the other gentleman you was speaking of," said I.

"Well, then," said the young woman.

"Well, then," said I.

And so, in fifteen minutes it was settled between us, and how it happened, or why, or which of us did it, or if it was both, or neither, I never could say. All is, it happened; and I turned up on deck to think it over, and the young woman she went to sleep by the cabin fire.

The storm was blowing off, a fold or two to once, like tissue paper, rolling down the harbor. I always like to watch a storm blow off. I kept the deck till dawn to see it, and not wishful to be a disturbance to the young woman, and for thinking of the young woman, and of what I'd done.

I told you, sir, I was of a curious turn of mind. Now I had some curious thoughts that night, after the blow set in, and the city lights cleared out before me, winking all along the shore.

It was the first useful thing I'd done, you see, sir, for so many years, that I took it strange and anxious; and I wondered what would come of it; and I had a strange and lonesome feeling very suddenly. It was about the oysters, sir. It seemed to me as if the young woman and me was very like the oysters, shut off there all alone. And there was that look about the city like some tremendous dredging-boat at anchor to drawr us in. And so I had it over to myself: What is the sense in being a oyster if you *wasn't* dredged? And what *is* the sense in being a oyster anyhow? And so it went, till morning.

The cat came up on deck, and was a deal of company. I felt bad when that cat died. She Died of Medicine, too, most appropriate, that very day week, the day I quit the dredging-boat, on

account of a taste for the cholera mixer. If the bottle hadn't been broken, I don't suppose she'd have swallowed the glass.

Come morning, when the young woman had dried her red calikker dress, and pinned up her curious hair—it looked like a whole shoal of goldfish, a twisted up. She says:

“I'll be honest by you,” says she, very soft and very pale—she was very pale; and looked so young! And stood up so pretty, sir!

Well, maybe she was; I never knew to the contrary, in the way she meant; I suppose she was honest by me; but look here! How was I to know anything about it? She said she took it for neuralgy. First three months after we were married she held off very well; next three, I found out as she'd always took it, since her mother fed her on it, a six-weeks baby, so she said; perhaps she did; I don't know, nor care.

Well, sir, you see I'd left the dredging-boat, seeing as I must have a decent house for a decent wife. I hoped to God she'd make me a decent wife, sir!

I'd left the boat and set up in the city; it's small choice you have in the city, sir, if you've not a trade. I never had a trade, and so I picked my way in the odd job line; hired to a head-porter one week; driv an express the next; had a fish-stall; made corn-balls; blacked boots; run a hack; took a contract on dough-nuts; and set up in fancy literatoor at the graveyard corner with a blind beggar who sang a song continual enough to wake the dead; besides a little puppy tied to his boot-leg.

To make a long story short, sir, she led me A LIFE. Yes she did. She led me A LIFE after the first three months was over.

Now that was what I couldn't explain to myself nor to another man. Why, *when* a man had undertook for the first time in his born days to do a useful thing, he should be led A LIFE for it. Not that I meant to put the young woman under obligations in my mind, but I had that feeling as if she'd see the sootability, as you might say, of making a man comfort'ble after it.

Fur's I could see, I done the best deed of my life, and they wasn't so many that I could have much choice, and it was an aw-ful blunder. That's what perplexes me.

I think you'll remember, sir, that I spoke about a swoird of Paradise? Fur's the young woman went, I'd a been back to my boat before the year was out, a dozen times.

But then, there come the little gal. *She* was the swoird of flames—God bless her!—that turned me and kept me, which way and what, from my old ways, and my lonesome ways, and my reckless.

I don't quite understand, sir, clear, how a man can ever be what he been before, after he's had a little gal.

Now I have that confidence in what you may call, meaning no onrespect, the sense of the Almighty, that I take it how He blessed that little gal of mine from the first on't. And that's more than I did myself.

“It must never be a gal,” said I. “She'd be like her mother.”

Sir? I don't quite understand ye. Why, yes; I suppose so; kind of a pity—her own mother—yes; but I'd got used to that, you know.

“She'd be like her mother,” says I. “It must be a boy. Of course it will be a boy,” said I.

You wouldn't believe it, sir, but the night that little gal was born, I took my hat and cleared. I never came nigh her for a week, and when I did, I wouldn't so much as touch her, nor look upon her little face.

“She'll be like her mother,” says I. How soon I found it out, I can't say; it couldn't have been three months; long before ever the little creetur spoke a word, I found out as plain as day

## Not a Pleasant Story

how she wasn't that. There was that in her eyes when she speared into my face, and that in her little fingers when they twisted into mine. I can't explain it, sir, onless to a man who'd had a little gal of his own that he'd feared would be like her mother.

If I was a younger man, maybe I should know how *to* make a long story short, but fact is, the more I think on't the longer it grows; I'm so easy put awry in my mind since war-times come and gone. And I come to set a sight by that little gal. And all that come and went seems to me to come and go for the little gal. And all was and wasn't, seemed to be and ben't, because of the little gal. And mostly all that I can remember—since war-times and since I took to aging—is the little gal. Somehow, it's a very long thing, sir, to love a little gal.

I used to rock her to sleep o' nights; she'd rather have me nor her mother; and I always brushed her little hair down for her mornin's, better nor her mother; and I used to slick up her little apron-strings, and ontie her little shoes; and I used to heft her softly in my arms, and lay her little arm agin my neck, and thank the Almighty for that she'd turned out onlike—; but I never told *her* that, sir; no.

“My baby,” says I, soon's ever she could talk, “marm's sick.”

“Marm's sick,” says Blithe, first thing she ever said. That's all I said to my little gal about her mother. “Marm's sick,” says Blithe over after me; always said it, sir, innocent and prompt.

My little gal is a gentle little gal, sir, with a pretty way.

I don't know how I ever come to leave her to 'list, I'm sure; but times was hard, and odd jobs slack, and—was I drafted? No, I wasn't drafted; and I don't think I was drunk, and I'm sure I wasn't pat-riotic; nigh as I can remember, I just went; come home one day to dinner, and I'd done it; to tell the truth. I don't remember much about it but a-standing in the doorway of a rainy day, to bid my little girl good bye.

Well, I went in early and I come out late; not that I was much of a Hail Columby man; but it's a sight more easy to keep on doing a thing than it is to stop, in general; and I sent the pay home reglar, and marm got the house and sign painter's widow of nine small children to write occasional, as she took in fine folks' washing, for she couldn't write herself; and Blithe, she promised to write me a letter of her own when she'd schooled long enough; but it never come; and so I staid along.

I went under Little Mac, and I come out under Sherman down to Atlanta, with this here arm,—by which I mean to say the one that ain't here,—in the trenches.<sup>103</sup> Clipped off by a shell. You never see anything slicker in your life.

“What'll Blithe say,” thinks I as I goes down, “when she sees it's the right un!”

Nigh as I can recollect, that's pretty much all I thinks till I get back to her.

So one day I come along home, weak for a bit, and faintish. And I sat down on a little step outside the dépôt, on account of being dizzy with the cars. It was sunshiny on the step, and sunshiny everywhere.

There come along a little gal, I remember, with the sun on her, and a two-armed father that lifted her over the mud.

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<sup>103</sup>“Little Mac” refers to Major General George B. McClellan (1826-1885); “Sherman” is Major General William T. Sherman (1820-1891). Both were significant Union leaders in the Civil War.

The little gal had a stick of red candy half in her mouth, and she held it out to me, all wet, and it was much as ever I could see it, for the sun. But I eat a piece of it to pacify her (God bless her!) and a piece I kept for Blithe.

I sat for a little upon the step, with the noise of the city kind of whirring about me, and it was kind of queer now, how I sat a thinking it was all made by two-armed men. Maybe it was because the jam in my elbow ached; or maybe because I had to walk such a long piece to get home; or maybe because I wished it was longer.

To tell you the truth, sir, it had been a kind of an awful thing between Blithe and me—leaving her with marm. And it was an awful thing coming back and finding her with marm, and spekkylating, and wondering, and considering if it would be one of marm’s days, and if Blithe would be much knocked up,—by which I mean it mental and moral, sir; take marm at her worst she never struck that child—and for wishing in partikkelar that Blithe and I could set down in the Common or somewheres alone, at the first.

It was such a sunshiny sort o’day, as I said; that sort of day when a man with a smashed elbow and a little gal feels as if he’d like a place to set in quiet.

So when I come along home, there come out a man with a little slate in his hand.

“How now?” says I.

“Any orders?” says he; and with that he hangs up his slate agin my door-post; he was a furrin-looking man, with a yeller face. “I have a Venus die Medicine,” says he, “which I think would suit ye; likewise a Gen. Grant of a most delicate shade of pink; and a Sister Madonna in gray clay,” says he.

“I didn’t come after my sister,” says I, “and as for Venus die Medicine, I buried her myself under a lumber pile of which the contract was lost, to the wharves. But I’ll take my wife and little gal, if it’s all the same to you.”

“There’s nobody’s wife and gals here but my own,” says the furrin chap, “nor has been this ten month. You’re welcome to some o’them,” says he; “I’ve got ten,” says he; and with that he hangs up his little slate, and is off.

I set down right there on the side-walk to get my breath and my wits together, for I felt as if I’d been struck in the heart. If I’d been hit by a Minie-ball I couldn’t have choked, for a minute, more suffocating.

It was walking so far, I suppose; and so weakly; and for the disappointment and distress.

Well; that was nigh ten o’clock of the morning; and it was seven of the night before I found her; it was owing to the furrin chap, after all; he turned out of a little alley along about seven o’clock, plump agin me. He had a board acrost his head of them little yaller statoos, and he nods as well as he could beneath it, and goes his ways. So I thinks to myself, why not turn down here? for I’d tracked them in so far as that a old woman three blocks back wouldn’t take her oath to’t, but she thought she’d heern tell once of a woman as took it for neuralgy very bad, answering to my name, go up and down along here somewheres. So I turned down the little alley, and I met a squint-eyed youngster which went along with me, and offered to show me the house for twelve cents to run after the furrin chap and a green plaster puppy who had a yellow tail.

I waited till the squint-eyed youngster was out of sight, hollering at the top of its wind around the corner, before I could make up my mind to go in.

And then I couldn’t make up my mind; and I felt a kind of sickness, suddenly, and a blur about the eyes.

## Not a Pleasant Story

It was a little house the squint-eyed young one had pointed out, a standing by itself, quite along by the water. I left my little gal in a decent place, and I thought, please God, I'd always have a decent place for her, and when I saw that house, as well as I could see it through the dark, for it was a growing dark, I couldn't tell you if I was to try, sir, how it come upon me.

Maybe you don't know, sir, what them living-places are like along the shore. Living-places? dying-places more like! Maybe you wouldn't feel acquainted with the smells and slime, and leavings of the tide? I never meant my little gal should be. She is such a gentle little gal, with such a pretty way.

It was a growing dark, I told you, sir, and my eyes was blurred, and altogether I could hardly see my way. First I knew I was ankle-deep in water.

"It's the tide," says I, "and I've lost my way. It was the tide indeed, sir; but I hadn't lost my way;" the house stood dead ahead.

"The child will drown," says I. Next thing I had the door smashed open, and another door, and another, and I come into a little back room, and I heard a little scream, and I stood stock still, knee-deep in the water, a staring like one dead.

There was my little gal, sir, a setting on the bed. She had a little candle on a table, and she set up close to it, and I see her plain. It was a little room, and the spots of mould stood out all over it. All around the bed's legs, and the table legs, and the stove, and all the miser'ble little furnitoor, the dirty tide come swashin in.

In a minute I'd splashed acrost it, two foot deep, and I'd got upon the bed, and I'd got her in my arm, and she had her little hands about my eyes, as if she'd shut the sight of her away from me till I could make my mind up to't. For I shook, sir, and I felt cold, and I'm a heavy man, and I s'pose I scairt her.

"Father!" says she, with her hand across my eyes. "Father! father! father!"

And then says she again, "O father! father! O father! father! father!" till I thought my heart would break, she cried and sobbed so: "Father! father! father!"

"I never thought you'd come!" she says. "O father! father!" till I was sure my heart would break.

"But you'll drown!" said I, a pulling of her little hands down from about my eyes to look around.

"Oh no!" says she, "the tide comes into the house twice a day, you know.\* I get upon the bed. It's never soaked the bed but twice. I get upon the bed and stay." With this she dries her eyes and tries to laugh, a looking round. "I am very comf'tble on the bed, I'm sure," says she. "I can stay till it goes down. Now it's so much warmer I don't mind the fire going out. Don't you mind. Why, father, don't!"

For all I could do I just set shaking, and all I could do I couldn't speak, for to think of my little gal—my little—

Well, well, sir, I come round presently and I says:

"How long have you lived in this hole?" says I.

"Six months," says Blithe. "Now father, *don't* mind!" says Blithe.

"Alone?" says I?

"Mostly alone," says she, "except for the woman up-stairs. She cooks for me sometimes. She's very good. You have to pay a dollar'n a quarter for up-stairs," says she. "Now father *don't!*" says Blithe.

\* A fact.



“And what was you doing up to the table?” says I.

“I curl,” said Blithe, takin’ up a lot of little feathers from the table. “I curl to the shop all day, and so I bring ’em home besides, when I ain’t too tired. Now father, don’t mind *that!* Why, how should I have had something twice a day to eat if it wasn’t for *that?*” said she.

And sir, when she turned her little face agin the light, I could well believe her. I never see such a little old, old face. I never see such a grave, grown-up, little thin old face. I never see such a planning, thinking, wise, and patient little face. I never see a face on a child’s shoulders that would have went to the heart of a quarry o’ stone, like the face of that there little gal of mine the night I found her curling of her little feather by her little candle on that bed.

It wasn’t till the dirty tide began to fall that I could bring myself to dare to speak it, for there was that passion in me, and that tremble, and them curses, that I darsent try before the little gal. At last I brings it, slow.

“And where,” says I, “is *her?*”

“Marm,” said Blithe, “was sick.”

“*Where,*” says I, “is *her?*”

“She took it, father,” said my little gal, in her patient little voice, “for neuralgy, father. We come from one house to another, and the more we come the more there was no money; and so we come to this one. And I curled the feathers; for I couldn’t go to school. Marm,” said Blithe, “was sick, you remember, father. O father, *don’t!* I’ve always got along. She wasn’t very bad. I don’t mind it now. One night, you see—”

“Well!” said I, sharp, for I felt I didn’t dare say what awful feeling, like the rising of an awful hope within my heart.

“One night,” said Blithe, “she fell over.”

“Over where?” says I, quick enough.

“Don’t hurry me,” said Blithe, and she put down her little feathers and drew up her little breath. “She fell—over—the bed, you see. The tide was in. I was to sleep, father, in the night, and come morning I set up, and the tide was out, and there she lay. The floor was all sloppy, and there she lay. I don’t like to remember that,” said Blithe.

Yes, sir, I went on my knees. Right down in the horrid wet on that horrid floor. I couldn’t have helped it, not to save me. Down I went, and I hid my face, and I thanked the Almighty for His unexpected favors to myself and a little gal who wasn’t like her mother. It was wuth the parting and the longness. It was wuth the arm and the misery. It was wuth a coming home to find her curling feathers for a livin’ in a two-foot tide upon a island—by which I mean a bed—beside a little candle. It was wuth bein’ led A LIFE, sir, a hundred times.

There was nobody in the world now but me and the little gal. I’d do it all through agin to have nobody in the world but the little gal and me. It was wuth the blunder and the punishment. It was wuth a being useful and a repenting of it. It was wuth so much, sir, that I declare I didn’t feel as if I’d ought to take it onrequited, for a sense of obligation come upon me very sudden. I’d never felt obligated, not even to the Almighty, in my life before. It was a very curious feeling.

But bless you! no; I never told my little gal. “Marm was sick,” said I, the same as ever. “Maybe it come too late,” said I.

“What come?” asks Blithe.

“The chance,” says I. For I remembered being on my knees upon the sloppy floor, how the young woman had drawed her hair across her eyes, and what she said about her chance. So

## Not a Pleasant Story

“Marm was sick,” said I; and I felt a kind of gentleness in my mind towards her, seeing now that she was dead, and from feeling obligated to Almighty God, I suppose, so unexpected.

“But you’ve lost your arm!” says Blithe.

“But what of that?” says I.

And what of that indeed, sir? Or of this or ’tother? Or of anything gone or to come, or that might be or that mightn’t, to the little gal and me?

So I thought that night, sir; and so I’ve thought a many times. But yet it was curious, now, sir, how it come upon me when the tide was out, and Blithe got down upon the slimy floor to light the fire for tea, how like we was to them oysters that have troubled me so many times—stranded there alone among the weeds and mud.

And then and many times I’ve thought it over. There’s things I’d like to be for the sake of the little gal. And there’s things I’d like the little gal to be for the sake of me. And though a man has nothing to complain of, sir, who is obligated to the Almighty for a little gal, yet I wonder sometimes why it is they come so hard and slip so easy; and why it is that, do my best, I can get my little gal just her dinners and her suppers, and just her bonnets and her aprons; and why it is that if *you* was to want the kingdom of heaven come on earth for *your* little gal, you’ve just to raise your finger for her, and it’ll come to time, express. I don’t know if I make my meaning clear, and I’m meaning no offense. But that and the oysters have given me a great many curious turns of mind.

And there’s the instremunt? Why, yes, and there’s the instremunt. A one-armed man can’t pick and choose; and what’s the pension, come to think on’t? A man is often lucky sir, to get the *chance* to be a public nuisance in this ere world. Never thought o’ that, now, did you? I bought out an I-talian just setting up in poetry ’tother end the city; your choice for five cents, and a large blue margin, sir, besides. There’s one toon I like. Ever hear it? It goes:

“Bonny Jockey, *Blithe* and gay.”<sup>104</sup>

I play that toon a sight. I like to strike it up, as a kind of compliment to her when she crosses over at the crossing there to school. I don’t play that toon so much for pay. Yes, she’s going to school. When we get into a pinch, she takes her little feathers home o’ nights; but I mean she shall go to school. She can cipher now, and write in capitals quite plain.

Did I undertake to tell a tale about the instremunt? I most forgot. Perhaps I’ve wore your patience, sir, a talking of the child. It’s pretty nigh one thing, you see, sir.

Did you ever hear me play “The girl I left behind me?” Yes? I thought so. I play that very often. That’s beefsteak. I get her a little piece of steak with that. And Champagne Charley? That gets her little shoes. She wears out a sight of little shoes. When she wants a little Reader, or a little pencil, or a little slate to school, I gener’ly depend, sir, on Old Dog Tray. That’s a fine toon, I think, don’t you? Old Dog Tray? When you come along, and I’m to work on “The pretty girl dressed in *blew*,” you’d know if you knew much that her little bunnet was most wore out. But when it comes to quarter-rent, there’s nothing for’t but John Brown’s Body. How I should ever have got along over quarter-day if John Brown’s Body *didn’t* lay a mouldering in the grave, I don’t see.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> This line comes from the Scottish folksong, “’Twas Within a Mile o’ Edinburgh Town.”

<sup>105</sup> Blithe’s father names his most popular songs: “The Girl I Left Behind Me” dates to

*Sir?*

I don't think you understood me, sir. I beg your pardon. Don't I never find her a burden to me, in my crippled state? Do you think as Hagar found the Angel of the Lord a burden, when she set a chokin' in the wilderness?<sup>106</sup> You don't know my little gal. She is growing up a very pretty little gal, with a pleasant way.

I'd ask you to call and see us if you wasn't quite a stranger. I'm particular about the acquaintances I make for Blithe. Meaning no rudeness, sir, I'm sure you'll see. It's quite a decent tenement, though I'd like it quit of the grog across the way, with a pink curtain to the window. You'd know it from the corner by the curtain. Blithe made that curtain, and hung it up herself. She made a little apron too, out of what was left.

It is high time I was at my stand, sir, for she'll be coming home from school. Perhaps we'd better walk a little faster. I shouldn't like to have her miss me onexpected. She'll come around the corner in a minute, in a kind of quiet way; you'd know her for that sort of quietness there is about her. Come night, I should get kinder bothered out, I own, on a hot day, or a chilly, if it wasn't for that sort of way she has. I'm not so strong as I was once.

What, sir? Bless you, sir! what's a man good for if he isn't worried more nor less? I reckon I can stand it. What would Adam have been wuth, now, if he'd staid to Eden, loafing round among his plants and greens? I've thought, this long while, I wouldn't have owned him for a grandfather.

There, sir! If you turn your head now—a little more. Do you see a little gal with a little book under her arm away around the corner? The one with the pink apun and the little brownish hat? The one that's looking round surprised to listen for her old father striking Bonny Jockey up? The one with such a kind of happiness about her little face? Are you sure you've got the one?


Not a bit like her mother, sir! Not a bit. That's my little gal.

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eighteenth-century England; “Champagne Charley” was a song from and the name of a musical popular at mid-century; “Old Dog Tray” was written by Stephen Foster in 1853; “The Pretty Girl Dressed in Blue” is another traditional Scottish ballad; “John Brown’s Body” might refer to the original “John Brown’s Song,” a famous Union marching song, or to “The Battle Hymn of the Republic,” Julia Ward Howe’s more literary version of that song.

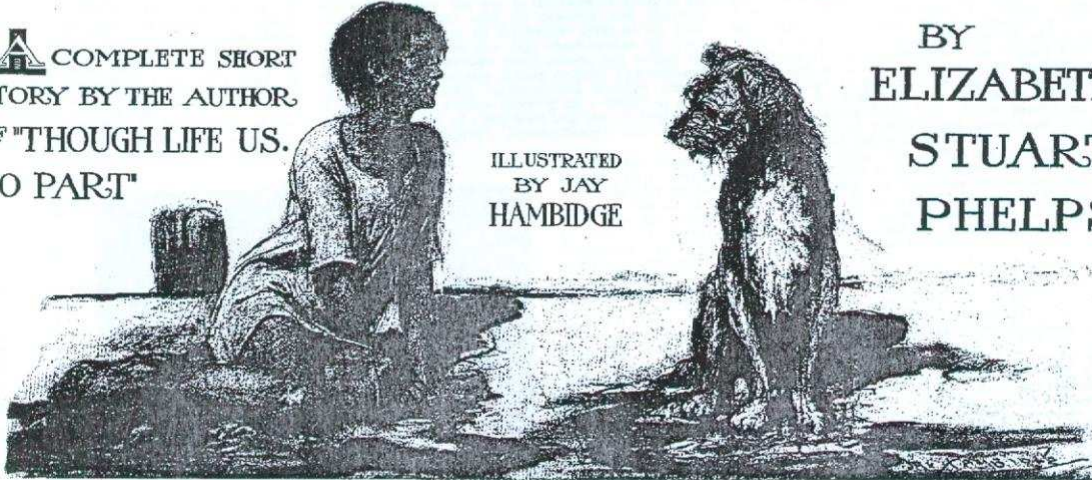
<sup>106</sup>In Genesis 16, Sarah gives her husband, Abraham, her handmaid, Hagar, to bear his children. After becoming pregnant and receiving poor treatment from Sarah, Hagar runs away. However, the Angel of the Lord convinces her to return to bear her child, Ishmael.

# "TAMMYSHANTY"

 COMPLETE SHORT  
STORY BY THE AUTHOR  
OF "THOUGH LIFE US.  
DO PART"

ILLUSTRATED  
BY JAY  
HAMBIDGE

BY  
ELIZABETH  
STUART  
PHELPS



"'Say,' said the boy slowly, 'I hain't never had nobody do nothin' for me like you done'"

## TAMMYSHANTY

The boy curled astride the bowsprit of the schooner, and looked over into the thick water. There are certain defects in early education of which one is so poignantly conscious at so tender an age that they might as well be, since they seem, irreparable.

Not to have experienced more than a term or two at night school, not to be able to offer evidential parents to society, not to have any home more concrete than the wharves, the bridges, the railroad yard, or a stray bed at the newsboys' lodge, and not to command an appreciable income—these are inferior circumstances about which one does not concern oneself.<sup>107</sup> Not to know how to swim—that is the irrevocable, that is the fatal thing. There is about this affliction an air of finality against which human hope cannot wrestle. The boy felt that it would be easier to get into prison and out again than it would ever be to get into the lake and out.

Once he had ventured to "do time" like a man, but he had escaped like a monkey. Once he had tried to swim, and it had taken two doctors and two hours to resuscitate his valuable life. He had long since come to look upon criminal careers and nautical sports as equally serious and objectionable. But the rebound of attraction to that which one has renounced is as inevitable as the nature of gutta-percha.<sup>108</sup> The boy hung upon the bowsprit and dared himself to drop.

"I stump yer!" he said.

<sup>107</sup> An 1888 history of Chicago, where Phelps sets this story, reports that The Newsboys' Home of Chicago was established in 1858 at 1421 Wabash Avenue. It provided newsboys with a bed, supper and breakfast for fifteen cents per day and did not accept boys over sixteen years of age. It housed over one hundred boys, ran partly on charitable donations, and had its own newsletter, *The Newsboys' Appeal*.

<sup>108</sup> Gutta-percha refers to the wood of a species of tropical tree, which was used to make decorative buttons and other accessories, and to the sap from these trees, which formed a natural latex often used in place of rubber.

The schooner was silent, and to all intents empty. The cook who was left in charge of her slept the sleep of too much and too recent shore leave. The wharf, deserted, blistered in the scorching noon. An ore barge that had lain alongside was laboring out in the teeth of a tug which never washed its face. There had been a couple of men fishing in a boat, but these had rowed away.

A pauper dog sat on a pile of lumber to view the scenery; but he had a misanthropic and preoccupied air; he did not notice the boy. There was not so much as a policeman, to say, “Move on, now!”

The child had taken off his clothes, excepting for a rag of underwear, and looked like a crab, half in, half out of its shell. He clung with a desperate daring, born of his conscious timidity, peeping over into the black-green depths; these seemed as solid as malachite, and as impenetrable. He hung by one dirty hand, then by the other—by two grimy feet, then by one—then by all fours; by his chin, on his stomach, by anything, on anywhere, unable to plunge, unable to refuse to plunge—a grotesque little image of irresolution, with whom no observant deity interfered.

Now, the bowsprit was shiny and slippery; and the boy was sprawly and not very strong; he had not had much to eat for a few days—in fact, he seldom did have very much.

It would not have been easy to say which came first, the splash or the cry. Without intention to defy the suicide laws of his paternal state, the lad was in the water, whence a final trapeze performance sustained upon one foot and one finger had hurled him.

He dropped, and sank, and rose, and shrieked. But the cook who had too much shore leave did not turn in his bunk in the hot fo’castle. The boy sank, and rose again, and this time he did not shriek.

His hair was red—the red that one might expect of a tiger lily crossed with a dahlia—the live, deep-bodied red, touched with orange and flaming. As he came up his head flared on the black water like a torch sputtering before it should be extinguished. He threw up his little thin, naked arms. As he went down he felt himself gripped, and after a while slapped in the face by something.

The pauper dog, who had been cynically regarding the lake, turned his neck slowly to look at the drowning boy—but after that he did nothing slow. He sprang, he leaped, he plunged, he swam; each impressive motion as swift as a noble feeling. Only a kinoscope could have followed the movements of the flying, battling creature.<sup>109</sup> He was not a handsome dog, but the beauty of the merciful nature was in him; its grand unconsciousness, its splendid disregard of self. To these things a muscle responds, as well as a mind.

The shore officer who ran down to the wharf felt the moisture start in his experienced eyes as he saw the sight. The two men in the boat rowed back with tremendous strokes, shouting:

“Good dog! Good fellow! Have him, sir! Get him, sir!”

The cook waked, and staggered up the companionway, and said:

“Damn!”

But the boy and the dog said nothing at all—the one because he was too weak and the other because he was too busy. The child had resigned himself instinctively to his rescuer, and

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<sup>109</sup> The kinoscope is an early [motion picture](#) exhibition device, made to view films individually through the window of a cabinet housing its components.

did not struggle. The pauper dog had seized the drowning lad by his little ragged underwear, and tugged at that stolidly, pulling and treading water with his paws.

A dreadful fact had now forced itself upon the animal's intelligence—either he was too small or the boy was too large. In a general way he had always observed that there were bigger dogs than he, but he had never been convinced that he was not their equal, or superior, when it came to the point. When he found that he could not support the weight of the lad, an intense mortification overcame him. Now mortification, when it does not crush, stimulates, and the dog's body, fighting not to be drawn under by the human body, became brain all over where it was not heart, and heart wherever it was not brain.

The animal perceived a chance—his only one—and took it. A rope's end trailed from the rail of the schooner and writhed like a snake in the water. The dog seized and dragged the snake. No man who saw it could say afterwards how it was done; but every stupid, helpless, laggard human of them agreed that the dog and the rope united before the rope and the boy did. One little purple hand reached, and missed, and rose, and clutched—and clung. The lad sprawled dangling; the cook, swearing, held down his drunken arms.

But the two in the boat rowed up on a spurt, and the Good Angel of the Gamin (if there be such a minister of grace) ordained that they should not be too late.<sup>110</sup> The fishermen jerked the little fellow off the rope and in upon the thwarts, where he lay dripping and lobster red. Then, pausing only to let off a curse or two upon the cook, they started back to the wharf with their passengers.

When they had covered a considerable space of fluent malachite it occurred to them in a leisurely way to look back. A little brown spot undulated through the water at their wake; slowly, as if it found difficulty in moving. One of the rowers asked:—

“Where's the dog, Jim?”

“Great Scott!” said Jim. “That must be him. Looks kinder tired, don't he, Bill?”

“Nigh petered out,” said Bill contritely. “Put about, an' be quick, you!”

With swift and powerful oars the two men put about, and brought up against the dog, who was swimming feebly, as if exhausted by his late exertion.

So Bill penitently pulled him aboard, and Jim said, “Good fellow!” and the boat resumed her course to the wharf. The boy had crawled from the thwarts to the bottom, and lay sputtering and shivering; he did not say “good fellow” to anybody, either man or dog. When the men had spilled their passengers upon the wharf they rowed away about their business, nodding, and reprimanding the boy:

“Don't do it again, you!”

The child blinked at them stupidly. His purple lips opened and moved several times, but nothing of value to the world came from them; he did not know how to thank anybody for a kindness; in his whole life he had never received enough to learn the art.

The fishermen rowed off. The cook on the schooner swore at the boy for a few minutes, and went below to finish his nap. The wharf officer came up and patted the dog, and shook the boy, and told him to move on when he got dry. Then he, too, went away.

The boy and the dog remained upon the wharf; dripping and shivering, they eyed each other cautiously. The dog saw a red head and freckles, a purple human crab, and a stealthy human grin to which he felt an inclination to respond. The boy saw an Irish terrier. He was a mongrel, and of a considerable size; his tail was stubbed to a humorous shortness, but his ears

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<sup>110</sup> Gamin originally denoted a neglected child, often one who lived on the streets.

were uncut; the shock of hair above his eyes was larger and thicker than usual, and gave to the slow imagination of the lad the impression of a tam-o'-shanter cap. The dog's eyes were fine and sad. At the moment they gleamed with something between pride and fear. The animal seemed to be uncertain whether he should expect to be praised or beaten for the deed that he had done. He regarded the boy with the alert wariness that one sees sometimes in the eyes of an experienced old Irishman who has met a new type of employer. After some silent reflection the boy cautiously observed:

“Hullo!” He had something of the diffidence that he once felt when he talked with a little deaf mute. It occurred to him that the dumb dog had more ways of speaking than the dumb child. Tail, eyes, ears, tongue, throat, each and all knew how to listen and to answer. The boy felt that he and the dog already experienced conversation. With growing confidence he repeated:

“Hullo!”

“Hullo yourself,” barked the dog.

“Hully gee,” said the boy.

“Hully gee,” returned the dog.

“Cold, ain't it? You bet!”

“You bet,” rejoined the dog.

“Deep, warn't it? Darn deep,” suggested the boy.

“Darned deep,” agreed the dog.

“Say,” said the boy slowly, “I hain't never had nobody do nothin' for me like you done.”

To this the terrier did not reply, but the experienced Celt in his eyes came out and scrutinized the lad, as if he weighed the probable meaning of the words.

“You ain't no relation, nuther,” added the boy. A flash in the face of the Irish dog seemed to retort, “Doncher be too sure of that.”

Now the boy hesitatingly extended a little dripping hand, and laid it on the terrier's drenched tam-o'-shanter. The child could not remember that he had ever caressed anything, even a dog or a kitten; and he did not know how. The dog recognized the attention by a pleasant wag of his too-short tail.

“Say,” said the boy, “you 'n' me might be pals.”

The dog assented politely.

“I hain't got no partikkelar place to put up,” admitted the boy, by way of apology.

The obvious reply, “I hain't none myself,” did not come from the dog. The process of thought was too complicated.

“Was you ever hungry?” asked the boy.

The terrier threw up his dripping head, and laughed.

“I be myself, sometimes,” explained the boy. “But somethin' or nothin', half's yourn. See?”

“I see,” said the dog.

“Me name,” observed the boy incidentally, “is Peter Roosevelt Tammany.”

The dog permitted himself a look of pained perplexity.

“But they *calls* me Jack the Marineer. That's cos I can't swim. Me common Monday edition name is Jacket. Got any name of yer own?”

The dog hung his wet head with embarrassment.

“How's Tammyshanty?” asked the boy.

The dog uttered a hilarious howl. Jacket hesitated for a reply, instinctively seeking something more serious than profane. Now and then, at Christmas time, he had wandered into Sunday school, and he raked his memory for a sacred phrase.

“Amen,” he said, after some thought.

“Amen,” replied the dog. The shivering lad solemnly put his arm about the neck of the drenched and shaking animal, and whistled something haughtily, as if he had been the owner of large private kennels. The terrier leaped and sprang to the sound. The boy hunted up his ragged clothes, and he and the dog passed soberly up the wharf together.

In the prelude to any union of spirits there is a solemn moment; and something of the seriousness of an intimate relation settled upon the gamin and the mongrel, as they trotted into the city and disappeared from the lenient eye of the wharf officer, who smiled, as if he had heard a good story which might bear repeating.

Love is a variety in unity, and we hear much, but not too much, about it. We read forever of the love of man and woman, and the love of a mother for a child; we study love as the chief lesson of life, and the choice material of art. In the great heart of human feeling at whose beats we listen, have we thought it quite worth while to count the love of a boy for a dog? A friendless boy for a homeless dog? One should add: A loveless boy for an unloved dog?

Jacket the gamin and Tam o’ Shanter the terrier came together in one strong dramatic moment and united like raindrops, or waves, or flame. What had life been to either without the other? In a week, in a day, it became impossible to imagine. The outcast animal, longing always for an unknown master, accepted the sweet servitude rapturously. The desolate child, knowing neither the name nor the fact of love, he who had no human tie, and knew no human tenderness, received with almost incredible emotion the allegiance of the dog. The swish of a stubby tail, the kiss of a pink tongue, the clasp of scrawny paws, the mute worship of dark, pursuant eyes—these became the events of a day, and mounted to the romance of existence. For such signs that he was dear to something the lad watched with an idealization that was well-nigh poetic; and for such cumulative evidence that anything was dear to him, he lived. A few men, but not many, remember or understand the capacity for affection in the soul of the boy. Behind the rough bark what fine sap flows! Below the blazonry, the bluff, the vulgarity, if you will, of a neglected lad, what gentle, what delicate fibers hide!

The gamin acquired that splendid fortune which may be the supreme ennobler of a human creature—he had experienced a great passion. Prince or poet may live and die and miss it, or even never know that he has missed it. Jacket the newsboy had found it, and recognized the fact. Everything that he felt, everything that he had was the pauper dog’s—the child’s poor corner in the attic of the tenement where he had become a lodger because he felt that Tam o’ Shanter needed a home and shelter; the scantiest meals that ever were earned out of a bad day’s business, or the biggest that good luck gave a fellow now and then—half of everything there was went to the patient, snuggling terrier, who never begged, who never grabbed, who ate silently, it seemed under protest, when the larder was low. The first quarter that the lad could save gave the dog a strap collar, laboriously marked in indelible ink with a master’s name and street and number. One day a deluded philanthropist who had inquired into the circumstances gave two dollars to license the dog.<sup>111</sup> The philanthropist was an old man, with an old-fashioned gray beard, and a

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<sup>111</sup> Dog licenses were issued in America as early at 1752, when the colony of Virginia instituted the law in order to make owners responsible for their dogs. Thus dog ownership



water-proof coat; he did not look like every other man; he was an officer in some society that occupied itself with the reduction of human cruelty; but that the street child could not know, nor would he have understood it if he could.

Among the recorded good deeds of many serious years it may be doubted if the gray man in the water-proof coat had ever done a wilder, kinder act than when he flung two dollars into the bottomless sea of gamin life, and trusted an unwatched boy to spend it for the protection of an unlicensed dog.

When Jacket returned from the city hall he lifted his red head proudly. He had become a property holder; Tammyshanty was a tax-payer; both were citizens; they celebrated the event by an extravagant supper. They bought a big bone with much meat on it, cooked it between two stones and an old piece of funnel in a vacant lot, and divided the consequences. In the development of their mutual affection the two tried to interchange tastes, if not natures. Tammyshanty would have lived on apples and potatoes (to which he cultivated a hopeless objection) for his master's sake. The lad would have eaten bones, if he could, for the dog's.

That night they slept ecstatically, Tammyshanty upon the foot of his master's ragged bed. A dozen times a night, whether asleep or awake, the boy felt about with his foot to make quite sure that the dog was there. In cold weather he covered Tammyshanty with his own ragged coat. With some vague reminiscence of his too-brief Sunday-school existence, he had taught the terrier to say his prayers at night. When one cried “Amen!” in a deep, religious voice, Tammyshanty barked, and jumped into bed. In the morning the two kissed rapturously, but sometimes sadly, for it was not always safe or possible to take Tammyshanty upon a journalistic career in the crowded crossings of Newspaper Row. The dog was in the habit of going to the corner of the alley with the newsboy, and returning home alone. There, on the broken steps of the tenement, he sat, a statue of a dog, whom neither fights nor fires, kicks nor caresses could allure, and waited for the lad. If it were very stormy or cold, Tammyshanty climbed to the attic bedroom, and watched soberly through a broken window, listening for a whistle or a call at which the heart of a dog must leap like climbing foam.

“Peppers! Peppers! Tammyshanty! Oh—oo—ee! Tammyshantee!”

Down the steps or down the stairs, across the alley, up the alley—to run as the heart runs, how short a time it takes! Sometimes twice, never more than that, the lad may cry:

“Pep—pers! Oh—oo—ee! Tammyshantee!”

Then, with clasping arms and paws, with little laughs of delight and yaps of joy, boy and dog are one.

Now it befell that one day, when business was dull, the two went out for pleasure, and took a walk of considerable length. A brown brick house came in their way, a house with an ell, and a yard; a gloomy house, whose shades were drawn. It had old-fashioned wooden shutters, of a dingy white, and in the ell the lad noticed that the shutters were closed.

A man stood in the vestibule of the house. He was a middle-aged man, dressed as a gentleman dresses. For some reason he did not strike the gamin as being a gentleman. The man's face was heavily lined, like a piece of old leather that has been folded into certain creases so long that it cannot smooth out. His eyes were cold, like Bessemer steel, and might have been as useful, for they were not stupid eyes; but something in their expression was indescribably repulsive. Jacket, who was whistling, glanced and stopped. The street boy was shrewd—as the tribes of the street are in the interpretation of character.

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became a part of citizenship in the colonies long before their unification.

## Tammyshanty

“That’s a fine dog of yours,” observed the man.

“You bet,” replied Jacket, proudly; but he walked on, without stopping. Tam o’ Shanter followed with a passionate docility.

“I’ll give you fifty cents for him,” pursued the man in the vestibule. He came down the steps and out upon the sidewalk as he spoke. “Here.”

He held out a long, sinuous hand, in which a piece of silver glittered. The boy and the dog stopped. The Irish terrier set his teeth and growled. Jacket threw back his head.

“Fifty cents! *Me? For my dog?* You must ’a’ come from ’way back.” The child laughed. “You must be orful green for a fellar of yer size,” he added.

“Fifty cents is a good deal of money,” returned the man with the Bessemer eyes. “I don’t know but I’ll make it sixty; seventy-five if you want to drive a bargain. I’ve been wanting a dog.”

The boy seemed, on the instant, to grow before the man’s eyes—as if he had been another man—and to tower above his elder and by all the standards of the world his superior. A terrible torrent of profanity poured from the gamin’s quivering lips:—

“I wouldn’t sell that there dog for—not for *seventy-five dollars!*” Jacket enunciated the words slowly, striving to express the inconceivable in the way of monetary values. Once or twice he had seen a ten-dollar bill. Once in his life he had handled five dollars. He dwelt upon this computation of human wealth with awe.

Then he turned upon his ragged heel.

“Peppers! Pep—pers! *Wireless* extry! Oh—oo—ee? Tammyshantee!”<sup>112</sup>

The soprano cry whistled down the alley. It was night, and a dark one; a winter night, some five weeks or so after the incident of the brick house. It was snowing, and very cold. The boy’s feet were wet, and he shivered as he hurried home. From a business point of view it had not been a bad day, and tucked tight under his ragged elbow the newsboy held his supper—their supper; his and Tammyshanty’s; a scrap of cooked beef, cast out from a poor restaurant for a poor but possible price.

“I’ll give him the biggest half,” thought the child. “He’s the littlest. See?”

There had been no answer to his call, and Jacket lurched into a run, repeating shrilly:

“Oh—oo—ee! Tammyshantee!”

As he ran he listened for the sure, dear bark. The lad’s lips moved, muttering:

“Must be so stormy I can’t hear him. Oh—oo—ee! Tammyshantee? Must be up attic. That’s wot’s ’e matter. Must ’a’ got shet in somewheres. Oh—oo—ee! Tammyshantee? He’ll be settin’ in ’e winder a-watchin’ an’ a-yappin’ like to split hisself. Oh—oo—ee!”

He pushed on, sprinting through the piling drifts, jerked the fringe of snow from his forelock and eyebrows, and raked the tenement from roof to cellar in one sharpened glance. The dog was not upon the doorsteps; the broken window was empty of his little watching, anxious, Irish face. Jacket dashed on, and up four flights of broken stairs, burst open the door of his attic, and fell in panting.

A wisp of snow had drifted through the broken pane upon the foot of the cot where the child and the dog slept. There was of course no fire, and the attic was very cold. It occurred to

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<sup>112</sup> The *Chicago Telegraph* was a major paper at the time; Phelps likely puns on its name by having Jacket work for the *Wireless*.

Jacket that it was cold enough to freeze even an Irish terrier, and he gasped and gazed. But the bed was as empty as the window. The dog was not in the room.

At the moment when I pause in the story, as one pauses before the thing from which one shrinks, my eyes chance upon these words chosen from one of the people’s philosophies of our epigram-loving day:

“*You don’t know all of grief and loneliness unless you are a boy, and have lost a pet dog.*”

The first of it seemed, at the time, the worst of it; though afterwards the lad came to know that it was not. He spent that night in the storm, baffled and beaten, searching alleys and yards, and tenements, calling upon neighbors, friends and foes, newsboys, messengers, letter carriers, girls in flaunting hats, all the population that exists by locomotion of throbbing streets. He went so far—and it is difficult for the sheltered and respectable and mature to estimate the extent of this tremendous step—as to consult the arch enemy of mortal man, the police of his own city. Towards midnight the storm stopped, but the little master’s passionate search did not. He crawled about town until the gray of the dawn, then stumbled to his attic, and dropped down exhausted upon the bed where the wisp of snow had driven to a drift. There, curled in his drenched clothes, he sobbed and slept a little, and dreamed that Tammyshanty slept and sobbed beside him. In his dream the lad moved his cold foot, and felt about for the dog upon the bed.

“Say, Mister, hev you seen a lost dog anywheres? A *licensed* dog? A yaller dog, mister? A pure mongrel Irish terrier dog? The purtiest t’ing of his kind you ever seen. Had a tammyshanty cap acrosst his eyes. You never seen such harnsome eyes. He warn’t no common purp; *he ain’t* no poorhouse dog. He’s got his master’s name—that’s me, Peter Roosevelt Tammany—printed on his collar, sir. But I’ll ’low they calls me Jacket gener’lly. An’ my residence, mister, my street and number in case anything happened to him. My dog’s name is Tammyshanty. He’s a licensed dog. I t’ought I’d find him long before now. See? Say, mister, *sure* ye hain’t seen any sech a dog? Not *anywheres*?”

This question, repeated a score of times a day, as many more by night, quivered plaintively through the city for a week, for two, for three; for more than the boy had kept the heart to count.

In his emergency he consulted all his old friends, and made some new ones. On the wharf endeared to him as the scene of love at first sight between himself and Tammyshanty, he sought, and as it befell, he found his rescuers, the two fishermen. He who was called Jim said:

“Sho! Cantcher find him?”

But he who was called Bill said:

“I’ll have a shy at lookin’ for that yaller dog, myself.”

The shore policeman strolled up and committed himself to the extent of saying, “That so?” and took the description and address of dog and master. Jacket had the pertinacity of purpose belonging to love and anguish. He went so far as to look for the drunken cook. But the schooner had vanished into the storm-swept, frowning lake.

The newsboys rallied around the bereaved child with the alert instincts of their calling. One passed the event to the other. A subterranean intelligence ran through the gamin world. In particular the afflicted boy was aware of the sympathy—as dumb as a dog’s, and almost as helpless—of two lads, officers in the Newsboys’ Association, and bearing, in that important

organization, their own dignities and titles, but known to an indifferent public as Freckles and Blinders.

“Dis t’ing otter be giv to de press,” suggested Freckles.

“I’ll speak to me Paper ’bout it,” observed Blinders with journalistic assurance. Jacket received this stupendous idea slowly. After giving it some silent consideration, he timidly sought his own favorite reporter upon his own staff and told the story of Tam o’ Shanter. The reporter glanced up from his yellow pad.

“Why, that’s a pity!” he said kindly, and went on writing.

“Say, mister, hev yer seen a dog? A yaller dog? A *licensed* dog? Wid his street ’n’ number on his collar—’n’ his name, Tammyshanty, sir? Hair stood up all ’round his eyes. Master’s name, that’s me—Peter Roosevelt Tammany—printed plain beside. Hain’t seen him anywhere’s? Hain’t ye seen *any* sort of a yaller dog? Hain’t ye—”

The plaintive entreaty, now learned by heart, and reiterated by rote, fell from the lips of Peter Roosevelt Tammany as a bag of ballast drops from a balloon in full flight, and sank with a thud into a guttural oath. The boy, blinded by grief, had failed to notice where he was or to whom he spoke. Now, the brick house with the ell and the drawn shades revealed itself like an unwelcome scene shifted suddenly upon a stage in an unpleasant people’s play; and in the vestibule the man with the steel in his eyes stood looking down coldly.

“Go to thunder, *you!*” screamed the gamin. “Offerin’ me money—*money!*—for me dog. Fifty cents—seventy-five—for a pure mongrel Irish terrier. Fished me outen ’e lake ’n’ saved me life, blank yer! Cuddled in me neck an’—an’ kissed me. Why, mister, I’d—I’d *give* ye seventy-five dollars for my dog. I’d git it someways er nuther. Proba’ly I’d git it from me Pepper. Wouldn’t mind ef I had ter steal it an’ do time for it. Say! Look here! You! Come back, mister! Look ’round here! You hain’t—you hain’t seen him anywheres, hev yer? Mister! Mister! Ef you did, ef yer ever should, you’d be *kind* to him, woun’dn’t yer? Cos he’s ’e littlest. See? You’d let me know, wouldn’t yer? He was sech an orful cunnin’ dog ... knowed so much ... an’ he wagged his tail so—’twa’n’t a very big one—when I got home—an’—an’ *kissed* me, mister—”

But the door of the brick house was shut.

Shrilling and sobbing, the child turned down the street unsteadily; he was seldom so demoralized; for composure and fortitude are newsboy traits. As he reeled along, punching his grimy knuckles into his eyes, he ran against an old man, tall and gray, striding in a water-proof coat. Jacket, sputtering out of his bath of tears, recognized the philanthropist who had lavished the incredible sum of two dollars to license Tammyshanty.

“Oh, sir!” he cried. “Oh, sir!”

Wildly he related the circumstances of his experiences at the brick house.

“Ah?” said the old man, sharply. “Show me the place.”

The two retraced their steps, and stood before the house. Most of its shades were closely drawn. In the ell the blinds were closed. It was a gloomy house, destitute, it seemed, of family ties, of the sense of home, of the consciousness of human love. While the old man and the boy stood regarding it, a strange sound escaped from the place; it accelerated, then lapsed; muffled, or perhaps stilled.

The child shivered and gasped:

“Sounds like—sounds like it was—”

“Come away,” said the old gentleman, quickly. He grasped the boy’s hand and led him, hurrying down the street.

The reporter looked up from his yellow pad. Jacket stood panting, ragged cap in hand. His teeth chattered in his broad mouth.

“Freckles ’n’ Blinders says—” he began. “De fellers says he *cuts ’em up*. Critters ... an’—an’ *dogs* ... livin’ ones ... they heern ’em.”<sup>113</sup>

He babbled forth some one of the tragic tales which are so unwelcome to the sensibilities that it is more comfortable to doubt than to investigate their dark significance. The reporter whirled on the revolving chair of an absent editor—the religious one.

“Must be one of these private experimenters,” he said below his breath. The chief was passing by, and stopped.

“They’re apt to do pretty rough work,” added the subordinate. “Shall we take it up?”

The chief stood with his hands in his pockets, and regarded the boy; who cringed when he saw the great man shake his head. Jacket’s faith in his “Pepper” was illimitable. That its strong arms encompassed all human powers, and some divine ones, he pathetically believed. His little body bent together like a shut jack-knife before the indifference of the managing editor.

“If there were any sort of story in it—” observed the chief. “It doesn’t strike me there is.”

The pen that wrote the best “story” in the office sighed for its opportunity. But the young man’s heart ached for the lad.

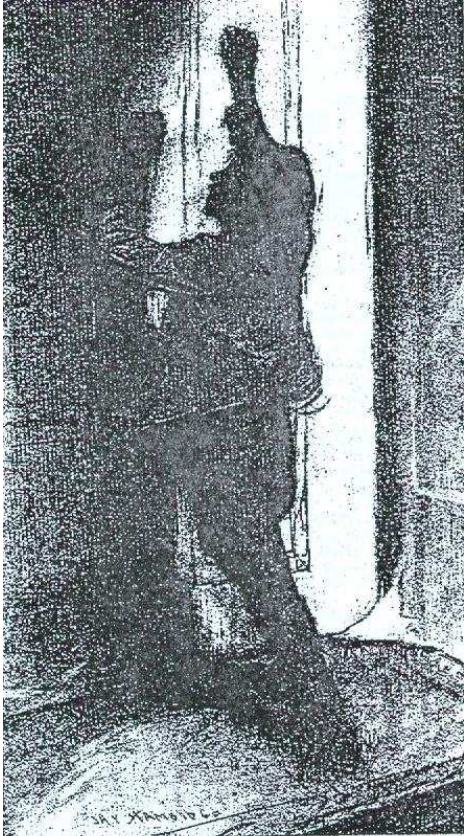
“Tell me,” he urged gently. “All there is to tell. There might be *something* I could do.”

Jacket did not answer. The reporter went out after him; but the child and the night had blended silently.

It was a wild night, and Jacket pushed weakly against the resistance of the brutal lake wind. He ran upon a little

squad of whispering newsboys, but veered past them, volleying incoherent, piteous words. His head hung forward, and his tongue lolled from his mouth. It was as if he scented the brick house as a hound scents prey. He flung himself upon the high steps. Choking between sobs and curses, he demanded entrance by fingers and feet, by voice and fists, by prayers and oaths.

“Gimme my dog,—you!—mister! Dear mister! *Please gimme my dog*. You got so many dogs an’ I ain’t got nothin’ but him—I’ll set the cops on you. I’ll set my Pepper on you if you don’t gimme my dog. Say, mister, please, mister, I’ll pay you for my dog. I’ll gin you a hundred dollars for Tammyshanty. My Pepper’ll start a public sooperscription for him. Don’t you *darst* tech my dog. Tammyshantee? Tammyshantee? Amen!”



“Gimme my dog,—you!—mister! Dear mister!  
*Please gimme my dog*”

<sup>113</sup> Jacket describes the practice of vivisection, which involves performing experiments, including dissections, upon living creatures.

## Tammyshanty

The door of the house remained shut, and locked, and barred. Jacket shook it furiously, and fell back. Like a cat he climbed up the iron railing into the area; crawled beneath the blinded windows of the large ell, lay flat upon his stomach, and beat back his sobs to listen. Plucking up his broken voice he softly called:

“Oh—oo—ee! Tammyshantee?”

Was it accident, or answer? Did his brain reel with his misery? Or had the lonely lad recognized in that inaccessible inferno the cry of his own dog?

He dashed over the railing and tottered up the steps. There, a raging little figure, hurling blow after blow upon the unyielding door, his friends found him. It was the old philanthropist in the water-proof coat who took the child to his aged heart. But the reporter was there; and the shore policeman (now promoted to an inland beat) and the newsboys, Freckles and Blinders, cursing behind.

“Tree hunderd more of us is comin’!” screamed the lads. “We’ll smash de doors an’ winders in! *We’ll* get Tammyshanty. You betcher life we will!”

But the policeman put out his awful hand and motioned back the thronging boys—three hundred of them, as their little officers had said.

“Nothing can get out that there yellow dog but just a search warrant,” said the officer sadly enough. “And the judge he won’t give it. He says the evidence is lackin’.”

Chattering like monkeys, the newsboys clamored and pressed up against the office. The old philanthropist patted the child upon his arm. The reporter stood in the foreground; as if he cast his lot in with the boys.

For a moment law and humanity regarded each other silently. Then the newsboys broke into a yell. It was taken up from the alley, from the sidewalk, from the windows of the neighboring houses, and swelled from the street beyond. Freckles pushed Blinders forward.

“Mr. Cop,” said Blinders, “we repercent every paper in dis yer city. We ain’t er goin’ in for no free fight. We’re law-abidin’ citizens, Cop, but we’re er goin’ to hev dat dog. You betcher life!”

“I wish to Moses you could,” admitted the officer. But he stood stolidly between the house and the muttering crowd.

Apparently baffled, the newsboys consulted in whispers, massed and turned away. The philanthropist and the reporter carried Jacket somewhere, and tried to make him eat or drink, to warm him or to comfort him; but the child, refusing, sat with a sly eye upon the door. While the reporter stirred the sugar in the coffee, and the philanthropist was paying for the beefsteak, the boy slid out of the restaurant like an eel out of a basket. He had not spoken a word. His face was pinched. He had ceased to sob. With the look of a little old man who was weary of life, but with the wings of childhood in his feet, he flew to the brick house. There, crawling flat beneath the windows of the ell, he lay and watched and listened. Once he faintly called:

“Oh—oo—ee! Tammyshantee?”

Towards morning, when it grew pretty cold, he climbed the iron fence, got back to the steps, and coiled himself against the barred door. His heart went through it like a battering ram. It was as if he could force his way in and draw the dog out.

Forty-eight hours is a long time to experience despair, but it is a short time in which to prepare for retribution. Of this the private experimenter found himself unexpectedly and poignantly aware. He sat alone among his victims, and eyed them with a grudging regret. It was well on towards midnight of the second day since the unpleasant scene which the uninstructed

public had made upon his premises. The uninstructed public, as fate would have it, had not gone away appeased.

The brown brick house was in a state of siege. Neighbors hooted at the blinded windows; epithets and missiles assailed the man with the steel in his eyes if he raised a shade. A door he dared not open. He sat and cursed. He listened and quaked.

The street that night had grown impressively, almost unnaturally still. He did not ask himself whether there were any reason for this circumstance. It occurred to him that no time was likely to be better for the execution of the purpose that he had formed, and he proceeded to hasten his preparations furtively.

The man, in a word, had been brought to the pass of contemplating flight. Startled by the popular suspicion under which he had suddenly fallen, the vivisector gave up his dreadful game. He yielded it so far as the protection of his life and limb concerned him; he did not propose to yield his “material.” He purposed, as is now well known, to betake himself and the doomed creatures in his power to some other, some safer lair; and to select for such a sally the small, dull hours after midnight, when the streets would be relatively quiet and suitable for his venture. The remarkable stillness in the region of the brick house misled him, and he decided to make the move at midnight.

He stepped stealthily about his laboratory. The place was dim, but it was not still.—This pen refuses to portray the sights which met the cold eyes so familiar with them that the man’s nerves did not complain. Such of his subjects as could walk he urged to their feet, and leashed them.

It was perhaps half an hour after midnight when the locked iron gate of the area fence swung open cautiously, and a man peered out. The street was quite deserted. Not so much as a yawning officer was to be seen. The vivisector tiptoed out, and down the sidewalk. Behind him followed a strange and pitiable group. Dogs on leashes, as many as the hand could hold; dogs fastened abreast and tandem to a rope dragged at the heels of their tormentor, followed him with the beautiful docility which only the dog, of all created beings, offers to the master man. It was not an uncommon thing for them to kiss his hand while they lay bound beneath his knife. At first this used to make him uncomfortable; but he had become quite accustomed to it.

Skulking, with darting eyes, he dragged the dogs along. He congratulated himself that he was not disturbed. He was surprised at the freedom of his movements. He anticipated that his troubles were over. The fugitive physiologist had proceeded perhaps sixty feet when there burst upon him a sound before which that which he called his heart stood still. No man city born or bred ever mistakes that sound. It was the roar of an oncoming mob. It seemed to him for the moment as if the whole town had become a throat.

The tramp of feet advanced upon him with an ominous steadiness. Out of the dimly lighted streets the crowd took rapid form—neighbors and strangers, women and men. Sobbing and swearing had become audible and articulate. For the first time in his life the man heard himself hissed. Officers in front threatened and beat back, but could not stay the onset of the people. Beyond, behind, surging and shrilling, pushed the newsboys—almost a thousand strong.

The man stood perfectly still. He cringed, but he did not cry out. He expected to be torn to pieces. He felt as if the heart of humanity leaped upon him. It occurred to him that he had no escape. It occurred to him that his subjects, in all the years of his red life, had no escape. He felt the air split with yells and curses. Instinctively, stupidly, he held fast to his dogs.

## Tammyshanty

Gray white, silent, with his shock of red hair standing straight up from his head, grimy hands clenched, teeth set, and lips drawn back from them like those of a snarling fox, Jacket had got himself to the front of the throng. The newsboys, Freckles and Blinders, pushed zealously to him and tried to support him on either side, he tottered so; but he did not notice them. His favorite reporter and the gray philanthropist in the water-proof coat said something to him, but he did not hear what it was. His old friend, Bill the fisherman, stood under the electric arc, and pushed his sleeves to the shoulders.

“If yer want anybody to punch him to a jelly, I’m your man,” he said.

The officer who used to be shore policeman turned his back and winked a little, but did not see nor hear the fisherman. Jacket noticed none of these things. To human sympathy he had gone deaf and blind. The reporter, trying to keep close to him, saw that the lad had dropped upon his hands and knees and was crawling on all fours like a small animal with some purpose which it cannot share with the superior race.

Suddenly and silently he pounced.

The dogs were of various breeds and all sizes, and huddled, themselves terrified by the rescuing people, clinging for protection to their tormentor, the only master whom their pitiable fate had left them. But some of them struggled, and one made weak efforts to escape from the rope to which he was attached. Plaintively from somewhere in the turmoil a stealthy call arose:

“Oh—oo—ee! Oh—oo—ee! Tammyshantee? Amen!”

The weak dog lifted up his wounded head, and feebly barked.

Then, as we say, the lad pounced. With one swift stroke he cut the terrier free, and clasped him; but in the making of the effort fell over on the curbing with Tammyshanty in his nerveless arms.

The act was enough to fire the fury of the crowd. It rolled on and swept under the street light. The lake fisherman who was called Bill made the first stroke, and liberated a beautiful spaniel, who kissed his brown, big hand. Knife after knife flashed in the electric tremor—cry upon cry applauded until every dog in the captive group ran free. It was said afterwards that some people in the mob who had dogless homes adopted these poor creatures, and took them to their roused, indignant hearts.

The police, who had mercifully ignored the descent upon the animals, rallied to the protection of the man. They dragged him off behind their billies—where, or to what future, no one at that time knew or cared. It has since been told of him that this practical physiologist fled the city where his scientific amusements had been so rudely interrupted by ignorant laymen, and that he escaped from the metropolis of the West to





the metropolis of the East; wherein it is not the province of this story to pursue his professional career.

But Jacket and Tammyshanty lay clasped and clasping upon the sidewalk, and neither spoke. The reporter lifted them in his strong, young arms; and the gray philanthropist, dashing hot drops from eyes too old to weep at much in a world where sympathy must blunt itself to suffering for its own life's sake, said imperiously:

“Call a carriage and a doctor, and bring them to my house.”

So the boy and the dog were lifted into the carriage silently and gently, and a thousand newsboys followed the cab as if it had been a hearse. Rumor ran riot in the streets—now that the dog was dead, and the boy lived; now that the dog lived, but not the boy; then that both were past recall to a life in which they had fared so hardly.

The morning edition of Jacket's paper ran like a freshet through the town. The pen that wrote the best “story” in the office set forth the fact—which had now become of compelling public interest—that the boy and the dog, though weak, and sore bested, would live; and that “*The Wireless*” had already instituted a public subscription in their behalf. A portrait of Tammyshanty, taken in his bandages, and sprawled in his little master's feeble arms, adorned an extra of that energetic daily. The Newsboys' Association cut this out and framed it, to hang upon their club-room walls.<sup>114</sup>

Jacket and Tammyshanty lay on a clean bed in the old philanthropist's third-story back room, and regarded each other seriously.

“Hullo,” said the boy.

“Hullo yourself,” nodded the dog.

“Hully gee,” said the boy.

“Hully gee,” said the dog.

“Warm here, ain't it? You bet.”

“You bet,” agreed the dog.

“Hard, warn't it?” sobbed the boy.

“Pretty hard,” blinked the dog.

“All over, ain't it?” asked the boy.

“All over,” smiled the dog.

“Say your prayers, amen,” said the boy.

“Amen,” replied the dog.

“An' we ain't no relations, nuther,” suggested the boy. Beneath the bandages on his wounded head a spark in the eye of the Irish dog fired as if he said:

“Doncher be too sure of that!”

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<sup>114</sup> The Chicago Newsboys' Protective formed in 1902 as a mutual aid association to lobby for better conditions, to assist newsboys in need, and to protest detrimental city bylaws.

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