

RE-MEMBERING ELLEN

POETRY

E. Chandlee Bryan & Ellen Maria Morrill

Ellen came to me in a small box
A stationary box once full of cards for gentlemen
a hound dog with bloodshot eyes on the cover

Inside the box a printout of emails addressed to the Canterbury NH
Historical Society: here is a daguerreotype of Ellen Maria Morrill,
daughter of Robert Smith Morrill and Betsey Eastman Morrill

Would you, could you, please take care of this daguerro girl?
The emails went unanswered, and Ellen stayed with cousin Ruth as
Ruth tended to husband Tom lying in his hospice bed.

On Easter Sunday, Ruth decided it time for Ellen to rise again—
she asked me: Would you, could you, please take care of this daguerro girl?
I opened the lid of the box. Read the printout of emails unrequited,

Lifted the burgundy cover embossed with gold to reveal
orange velvet casing, and tilted my head
to see past spots on glass that cannot be cleaned

Here is a girl on the cusp of womanhood:
dressed in a black dress with a scoop neck and pleats
long brown hair braided, looped over the ears and adorned with daisies

Accompanied by a handwritten card – Ellen Maria Morrill
took a night shift caring for the sick hired man at her uncle's house
He recovered but she died. January 2, 1852.

Cousin Susan lives on the family farm where Ellen died
My great-grandfather's business closed in 1933 but lives on a museum
We have been given names after one another:
There are five Marys, three Ruths, three Johns.
I am one of two Eleanors; no one passed down the name Ellen.

Ellen was a writer. She wrote sonnets
published posthumously in the New Hampshire Statesman.

The prefix re means “again”
To re-member is to make someone a member again
As I retype her work, I am re-membering Ellen
Maybe for me, maybe for you, she says,

*A salutary lesson may be learned from the rehearsal of passed events
and the realities of the present.
And may we so cultivate and fertilize our hearts,
that we may have a blissful home in the spirit land at last,
where young hearts ne'er grow old,
beauty never fades,
and passing away is unknown*

It is an attempt at restoration

Ellen cannot take me on a horse and carriage ride
But I have taken her places beyond her imagination—
rides in an elevator and a hybrid car
Nestled inside the box I've got what she calls

*a hopeful token,
for this stern trial hour;
tho' death the vase hath broken,
he could not blight the flower*