

FRIENDSHIP.

As the day declines to even,  
Falling in the arms of night,  
One by one the stars of heaven  
Shed on earth their constant light.  
So when life's bright sun is hidden  
By the heavy gloom of woe,  
True friends like the stars, unbidden,  
One by one their lustre show.  
—Barry Lyndon, in the Chicago Current.

LOUIE AND I.

BY HARRIET PRESCOTT SPOFFORD.

If I had been the least bit pretty I shouldn't have been surprised at it all; or if I had even been bright and witty; but such a little simpleton as I!

I never in all my life had the least expectation of lovers, or of any sort of admiring glances; and I never had any. And sometimes mother used to say she guessed it was just as well, for if she had had to dress two girls out for their pretty looks, as she did one, it would have beggared her. Mother only had a little money, just barely enough to live on, and some of the principal going every year, but it wouldn't have been in human nature, having a daughter so pretty as Louie, not to want her to have the best that would set off her peach-bloom beauty; and, for my part, I never grudged Louie a rose or a ribbon. I couldn't have worn them if I had had them, for I was far too proud to try to do what Nature hadn't, or to pretend I thought such things became me; and I liked my print dresses and plain collars better for myself.

But when Louie was dressed in her muslins till she looked like one of the old-fashioned blush roses, so white without and so delicately flushed within, her lovely yellow hair breaking out in sunny curls all over her head, and she all radiant, as you might say, with her skin, her smiles, her teeth, her great blue, beaming eyes—then I used to like to look at her as much as any of her lovers did; to look at her as I would look at any lovely picture; and she always turned from her gayest scene—the dear little person—to give her sweetest smile to me.

So when Dennis began all at once to come to our house, as if he had just seen Louie for the first time in his life, I was only delighted. For every one who knew him loved and honored Dennis Reed, who was the soul of all integrity; and if he wasn't a beauty himself, he was a stalwart son of Saul, and had the nicest little place in the region—a cottage up a lane, overlooking the river, and with a wood behind its orchard and across the railway cut, to keep off the east wind—if the east wind could ever blow in that sunny nook with a garden spot made and blooming in every cranny of the rocks around it.

He married her, and took her away; and a happier nest of singing birds than that in the little cottage among the rocks and flowers could nowhere have been found, unless it were in my own heart, at the sight of the happiness there.

But then mother fell sick, and it took all my time to care for her; and I couldn't go up to Louie's very often; for I had everything to do at home, and was tired out by nightfall; and often up half the night besides. Louie couldn't very well come down often; and if she had come, she wouldn't have known what to do. Poor mother! Once I remember, she said to me, "I don't know but it's more satisfactory to have one daughter plain, than anything else." And it made my heart bound. And then I reproached my selfishness in caring to have her say that over Louie's head, as it were; but I remembered it long afterward, and sometimes it used to give me a throb of joy when everything was dreary, and I seemed to be alone in the world.

For mother died presently. And then it turned out that she had been living on her little property more than we had dreamed, and Louie's outfit and her own long illness and its bills had used up money. And when everything was paid, they had only enough left for me to hire one room as a sort of refuge when I came home at night from working at my trade; for I had quite a knack at dressmaking. I did not put on mourning; for I was glad that mother was out of pain, and I was glad that she was gone before she knew that all the property was gone, and she, with her proud spirit, would have had to be dependent. But Louie did—and oh! what a beauty she was, with her black crapes falling around her, so waxen, fair and rosy and transparent! Of course she didn't miss mother the way I did. How could she, with Dennis waiting on her every wish? And she didn't seem to want anybody

it Dennis, either; so I didn't see a great deal of her, only when she had something new to make up, or something old to alter over; and then she and Dennis were out most of the time, strolling among the rocks or planting a new flower-garden, or she was going to meet him coming from his work, or running into the next neighbor's across the pasture, and I had almost nothing of her, except at trying-on times. I used to wonder at Louie then, a little, sometimes; not for not sitting at home sewing and helping me on the work, because you might as well have asked a humming bird to do that; but for not taking more interest in the house and keeping things trim and tidy. And I used to be afraid that if I were Dennis, and there were holes in my socks, and half the buttons off my clothes, and my coat and hat never brushed, and I came home and found nothing for dinner—not even the cloth laid—and my wife off enjoying herself somewhere else, and the dust everywhere so that I could write my name, that I shouldn't feel recompensed for all that by having my wife stroll round hanging on my arm, looking as pretty as a new-blown rose. And yet although the house must often have been thoroughly uncomfortable to Dennis, he never gave a sign that it was not paradise itself; and I came to the conclusion that he didn't really miss those other things, and was satisfied with what he had.

I used to go up into the Eden sometimes without being sent for, and mend up everything, and put the whole house straight; but I couldn't go so very often on account of my work; and, beside, I had a sensation of intruding where two people wanted but each other.

But at last the babies came; and then I had to go. And Louie was wild with delight, and insisted on having them laid on the pillow close to her cheek, and talked and laughed and cooed and cried to them with such glittering eyes and dazzling color in her face, and said it was all she wanted, even if she were in Heaven to-morrow!

"But your husband, Louie!" I exclaimed.

"Oh! husbands are all very well," she said. "But I haven't been such an awfully good wife. You'd have made Dennis a great deal better wife, dear, for the matter of that. But my little sons! Oh! I know I could be a good mother!"

She was in Heaven to-morrow, the dear little innocent soul, and one of the babies went with her.

I was glad that the little baby went too. For I remembered that she had said then she would have all she wanted; because it troubled me to think that, for all his grief to-day, Dennis wouldn't be like any other man in the world if he didn't marry to-morrow; and the other wife would have the long life with him, and become dearer and dearer, and Louie would fade into just a beautiful dream; and when the next life came, it would be the dear wife of the long-continuing time that would be his companion, and Louie would be all alone if it wasn't for the baby, and she had said that the baby was enough. Of course all this was only a sort of flash through my consciousness, not any deliberate thought. Nobody could have thought about anything of the kind who saw Dennis's grief. He was all beside himself. I don't like to tell you what he said and did: I was half afraid sometimes that a thunderbolt would fall and destroy him; and then again I was afraid that he would destroy himself. I don't know how we ever contrived to get him to let Louie be placed in her casket, and I thought he would jump into the very grave itself. But at last that agonizing time—every moment of which knows how to give a fresh stab—was over, and the worse time came, of the absence and silence, and wild, vain, bitter longing. And Dennis couldn't look at the baby. "Take it away!" he said. "It killed her!" So I took him into my own room, and cuddled him close to my heart every night, and every morning he awoke me with his laughing and gurgling and crowing, playing with the shadows of the dancing leaves across the bed; and he had Louie's yellow hair and rosy cheeks and perfect features, her great longing blue eyes, and Dennis's black eyebrows, and every day he grew dearer and dearer, and more inexpressibly dear, and I said to myself that, much as I missed poor Louie, here had been made up to me all I had failed of in my life; for this child was to take the place to me of mother and sister and husband and child altogether. And the dearer he grew, the more angry I became with Dennis for his indifference; and one day, when the boy was about four months old, I said:

"I think you had better let old Nancy come in again and do your chores, the way

she used to do, and I will go away and take the baby—"

"Take the baby?"  
"Certainly," I said. "You can't bear the sight of him, and I love him. And then if ever you marry again—"

"I shall never marry again," he said, the gloom settling in his eyes.

"I don't believe you will!" I exclaimed. "I don't believe there's the woman living who will ever take such an unnatural, wicked father, for her husband! Louie's own child, too, and the very image of her. I wonder what she'd think of you!" And I snatched the baby up out of the cradle, and ran from the room, lest I should break out crying before his face.

The next afternoon when Dennis came in from his work, he went and made himself all nice, and changed his clothes, and came down to where I stood in the side-door with the baby in my arms, looking at the sunset. And he stooped to take the child; and the little darling turned, with a low, frightened cry, and hid his face in my neck. And then, all at once the tears that I hadn't seen Dennis cry in all this time, gushed out, and he put his arms around the child, who began to scream with terror; and as I half turned and maintained my own hold, he took him forcibly away from me. "Let go!" he said, in his low, half-smothered tone. "He's my child!"

"I suppose he is!" I cried. "By some wicked form of law, the cruel law that men made for men. But you don't deserve him!"

I never was so angry. I thought I would take my things and go away that moment. But how could I leave the baby? His little screams were torturing me then. I set down on the door-stone, and flung my apron over my head, and put my thumbs in my ears, and wished the baby and I were dead along with Louie.

Perhaps it was an hour afterward when I looked up, and there was Dennis coming through the orchard with the baby, and the boy was crowing and jumping and catching at the bending boughs, and catching at his father's great mustache, and rubbing his little wet lips all over Dennis's face, chirruping and joyous; and I couldn't help it, I ran to meet them.

"You see," said Dennis, as he let me have him back, "blood is thicker than water, after all."

Oh! what a long journey I felt as if that baby had been on as I took him and could hardly have done kissing him.

"Come," said Dennis, laughing, "leave something of him for me."

It was the first time he had laughed since that child was born. And the darling had gone a long journey—a journey into the infinite depths of a father's heart.

Well, after that, Dennis couldn't get home early enough in the afternoon, and it seemed as if he hated to go away in the morning, and Sundays he had the baby in his arms from morning till night. And in the evenings, when I sat sewing on the little clothes, he would come and sit opposite, or where he could see how the work went on; and he brought home all sorts of little, impossible toys, and he talked and sang to him, and walked with him; and the baby began to look out for his coming as much as I did. And all that, of course, helped me a good deal in my work about the house, for I kept everything as fine and orderly as a honey-comb; only, with the baby to tend and see to, I sometimes had to sit up nights to do it.

"I shall call him Louie, for his mother," said Dennis, one night.

"Do you think you can bear it?" I asked.

"To hear him called Louie? Yes. He is Louie over again," said Dennis.

And I couldn't tell you how pleasant life grew to be as we watched the child grow, unfolding like a rose. There was absolutely a sort of rivalry between us presently as to who should discover his first tooth. When he took his first step, it was between Dennis's arms and mine, as we both sat on the floor. And when he spoke his first word, how we listened to learn if it were Dennis's name or mine. The day wasn't long enough for us to watch his dear loveliness in. And I think Dennis was envious of me for having him nights; but he couldn't help that.

So time went on; and I thought then it would not be easy to say how we could be happier; for even the memory of Louie was softened into something that was hardly a grief to us in our love of her boy, though sometimes I used to wonder if the little fellow that went with her was as sweet as the one that stayed with us.

But when the dear child was about

three years old there came a snake into Eden. A snake? A whole nest of them! It seemed as if every girl in the whole village had just found out what a rare and charming person I was, and how pleasant it was late afternoons up where I lived, and how nice it was to run up evenings to see me. And sometimes Dennis would have to go home with them then; and sometimes he wouldn't, but just went out the other way, and never came home till they'd gone; and somehow one thing was almost as unpleasant as the other, and I couldn't say why it worried me—I only knew it did. And I used to take the boy and go off by myself and cry. For, of course, sooner or later, Dennis would marry some one of those terrible girls; he couldn't help himself; they wouldn't let him help himself; it would come about after awhile as naturally as water runs down hill.

And then there would be a stepmother for my boy, and Heaven alone knew what would become of him. And what would become of me?

And by this I gave out completely. I should have to go away. I should see Dennis no more. No more of that dear voice and presence, and cheery way of his. And all at once it came over me in a flash of horror and shame what was the matter with me; and then I felt that, happen what would, I really must go away.

But I couldn't go and leave the boy; and there I was. And I grew pale and could eat nothing, and was stiller and stiller every day. I could as soon have talked Hebræw as have smiled.

But one day I had the little fellow asleep in his morning nap, which he had not quite outgrown, although it was getting to be short and fitful; and, thinking that Dennis was there to see, or knowing he was, and thinking nothing, I went out by myself, down the road by the railroad cut; for there was an apple tree there where I gathered the wind-falls, and I liked, too, to sit on the bank and see the train dash by in the cut. I had my apron full of apples, and, as I came back, I stood loitering a moment or so on the steep bank, hearing a train coming, and liking all the rush and roar and rattle that seemed to snatch me out of myself, as if it told of a way to somewhere, some distant region, where my trouble might be forgotten; and all at once another sound from that of the approaching train caught my ear, a glad, gay shouting and crying. I turned and looked to right and left, a little confused, for it was the child's voice. And, turning back suddenly, I saw him; and there, at the foot of the bank, in the very center of the railway track, stood the little fellow, who had crept from his bed and ran after me, and been beguiled down the slope by some blossoms that he saw there—there, in the centre of the track he stood, waving his little hands and shouting to the coming train. There was not a half minute, it seemed, but in less time I was down there, and was just grasping the child when my foot slipped, and I fell with him in my arms, and the thunder was in my ears and the hot breath in my face, and I knew that was the end.

No; it was only the beginning of the end. When I knew anything more, I was lying on the bank in Dennis's arms, for he had come bounding after the boy, and had snatched us both out of danger as the engine, like a wild dragon, whizzed and roared and thundered by, and he was holding me as if he would never let me go.

And he never has let me go. "Oh!" he cried, "I found out in that second what life would be to me without you, dear; something I couldn't bear a day." And I only clung to him, too ashamed to let him see my face, too tired and weak to lift it. And so it is I that am the second wife, and the boy's mother. And I suppose everybody was surprised; but nobody, as I told you, was half as much surprised as I.—*Independent.*

Discouraged at the Outset.

A stranger who was quietly looking over a water-power in a Western village was sought out by the Mayor, who said:

"I hear you think of starting a factory?"

"Yes."  
"It's a good place, and you'll find our people all right. We don't put on a great amount of style, nor don't aim to. Here's a pair of suspenders I have worn for over forty years, though I'm worth \$50,000."

"Ah! Um!" muttered the stranger. "but it was a suspender factory I was thinking to locate here."—*Wall Street News.*