

ELEGY ON THE DEATH OF OLIVIA.

The wind is breathing soft and low,
The dew-besprinkled earth is cold,
The distant hills and mountains glow,
With tints of purple and of gold.

The river glideth swiftly by,
Its wavelets sparkle in the light:
They seem to tremble, faint and die,
And dying pass away from sight.

I hear the minstrels of the grove
Sing out a clear melodious strain—
A song the very soul of love,
And joy that's unallied to pain.

An influence o'er my spirit steals—
A breath like the sweet air of morn—
A voice that hidden life reveals,
And says, "Rejoice that thou wert born."

Rejoice! but ah, can I forget
The light and love of other years?
No—even now my eyes are wet,
For Memory breaks the fount of tears.

I touch the lyre, the sounding string
Breathes out a melancholy strain;
And sadness runs through all I sing
For her I ne'er shall see again.

Alas! before the violets came,
Before the winter's snows were fled,
From trembling lips I heard her name,
And some one whispered, "She is dead!"

Yes, she was dead! for the red flush
Had faded from that silent face,
Which oft in life had worn the blush
Of modesty and tender grace.

Closed were those eyes, whose wonted fire
Bespoke the kind and generous heart;
Their glance no more could hope inspire,
Nor light, nor joy, nor thought impart.

And that sweet voice was silent now,
Whose tones were music to the last,
While on that white imperial brow
Death's ghastly dew was gathering fast.

O bitter thought! it wrings the heart
To think that she, in youth's full bloom,
Should sink 'neath the Destroyer's dart
Into the cold and darksome tomb.

Oh! why does beauty fade and die
And friends depart and be forgot?
Is there no realm of cloudless sky,
Where friendship lives and death is not?

Olivia! in what deathless sphere
Does thy immortal spirit shine?
Canst thou no distant murmur hear
Of him who weeps at thy pale shrine?

Paris, Ont.

H. M. STRAMBERG.

JERRY'S GRANDMOTHER.

A STORY OF GRAND ISLAND, NIAGARA RIVER.

BY JENNY MARSH PARKER.

I.

"There is this about it, Peggy," said father, "I don't see where the money is comin' from. If I could catch some of these smugglin' fellows that are runnin' brandy into Buffalo Barracks right under the noses of the officers, there'd be some sense in your talkin' about going off to school. But it isn't my luck, Peggy, to be lucky. It never was; and since she died, I don't see why Grand Island isn't just as good as any other place for you and me."

Father swung his axe on his shoulder as if it was heavier than usual that morning, and walked slowly away to his work. I tried to say good-bye or something, but I felt just as I would had I known the island was slipping down the river to the falls, nothing on earth to stop it, and talking wouldn't help. No, I wasn't filling up to cry. I was thinking I would never cry again for anything. I would give up everything mother taught me to hope and work for; I would just fold my hands and sit down and be contented to live on as I was living. I would never expect anything better; every day in the year might be like every other day. I would feed the pigs and the chickens, get the breakfast, dinner and supper of pork, potatoes and bread for only father and me; wash and iron and patch; never have anything pretty and nice; never know any young people, nor have books and newspapers, and pretty worsted for fancy work, nor even shoes in the summer time, until our debts were paid. Just live—that was all, and I was only 17 years old. I stamped my bare feet at the thought of it, and it was well I did, for the hens were on the breakfast table, and making a pretty mess of things.

That was in July. Mother died in the spring. But I can't tell you about mother. If I begin all that the rest of my story will go down stream, just as the arrows did I used to shoot far out into the Niagara river, and then guess how long they would be in reaching the falls. We lived on the west side of Grand Island, not more than half a mile north of the Falconwood grounds. The club gave a great deal of work to father; about all we had to live on. They were clearing their grounds, you see, and it was wonderful how they changed swamp lands into Eden. But it didn't help me to be contented when the handsemlly-dressed young ladies would come right up to the door of our shanty, like the butterflies—only the butterflies didn't make me so uncomfortable. One day, when I was weeding the onion bed, a party from the club house came up to the well for water, and I never looked out from under my sun bonnet, nor pretended to know they were there.

"I should think she would be afraid it would make her feet big to go barefooted," one of the girls said, not meaning that I should hear her. They all laughed. I don't know what made me think of mother just then, but thinking of her saved me from speaking my mind. Perhaps it was the sweet voice of that pretty girl. I looked after them as they went away. She had blue ribbons at her throat and on her hair, and the prettiest boots on her little feet. A young gentleman carried her parasol. He cut a bouquet of my cinnamon roses without asking, and she trimmed her hat with them. It was hard weeding the onions that morning. I could hear them laughing and singing as they rambled in the woods. The wish that I might not always be shut out from everything got the upper hand of me. Father saw something was wrong after I had moped for three or four days, and on the morning I am telling you of he asked me what was the matter. I told him what I was wishing for, and that was his answer—he didn't know where the money was coming from.

There was nothing like a good row on the river when I was down-hearted.

Well, that morning I went down to my boat and pushed off without knowing or caring where I went. I floated awhile with the stream, hardly lifting my oars. I remember sitting motionless out there on the river, and looking back to our cabin—you could hardly see it for the trees—and wondering why, when the world was so big, I must live just there and die there and never wear blue ribbons nor have cinnamon roses stuck in my hat. I was close to Navy Island, the resort of the smugglers.

After a little hard rowing I had fastened my boat and had climbed up the bank into the thick wood. It was a little harbour, a very bower of trees and vines. I looked at the island and thought of what mother used to say: "One must get out of this life and look at it as somebody else's to see the blessings it holds." Well, if Grand Island was like my life, if my life—but I must have been half asleep, or perhaps I should have thought out something worth telling, before I was startled at hearing voices, men's voices, on the other side of the thicket behind me, and a sound like breaking the hard-baked earth with pickaxes.

"I tell you, Hank," said a wheezy voice, "if we don't get this haul into barracks before the week's out we may as well sink it in the river." Then followed something about "the point," and "Jerry," and "dear old grandmother," with much cursing and laughter. There were three men at least, and I soon heard enough to learn that they had been on the island since the middle of the night before. Thoroughly frightened and hardly able to move for a minute, I knew I must escape from the place as soon as possible. They were laughing at something about a coffin when I slipped noiselessly down the bank and into my boat. I kept in the hiding of the trees until I could safely put out from the shore. I had a hard struggle with the swift current, but mastered it and got home in time to have father's dinner ready when he came in. He had finished his dinner and was filling his pipe, when I asked:

"What was it you said about brandy smugglers this morning?"

"There's too many of 'em for Cap'n Bedell for onc't, Peggy. Them barracks is just afloat with Canada brandy. How the soldiers gets it nobody can tell."

"Who lives in that little house out on the point?"

"The 'point' was a desolate sandy bluff on the lake shore, not far from the river; a bleak spot, the last place in the world, one would think, for building a house, but then we can't all choose where we live, you know."

"Oh, that's Jerry Clark's. He runs a hack at the falls. Makes lots of money, they say. Supposin' I run a hack, Peggy. Supposin' now—"

"Does he live there on the point? How can he do business at the falls?"

"Oh, Jerry lives at the falls. You wouldn't mind stayin' here, would you, Peggy, if I could do handsome drivin' a hack somewhere else?"

"But who lives on the point, father? Is there anybody in that lonesome house?"

"Jerry Clark's grandmother lives on that point. She is a bit crazy, he says, and thinks she can't sleep anywhere else. Her husband went down in the—the—that 42 steamboat—or was it 43? But of course you don't know, Peggy."

"Who takes care of his grandmother?"

"Jerry is dreadful kind to her, says she can't live much longer at the most. There is a big bouncin' girl over there—bigger than what you are, Peggy; she was rowin' out here on the river the other day. Capt. Bedell happened down just then, and she hailed him and asked where she could get a good doctor for the old woman. She was took worse, she said. Then she asked the captain if he knew of a good boy to help 'em over there. They are wonderfully put to it for a boy. The captain sent her to Brown's, but she didn't get one, for I see her goin' back with-out any."

There! I have forgotten to tell you about Pont. The story without Pont in it would have to be told by somebody besides Peggy Herrick. Pont was my dog, a big brown water spaniel. He could talk with his eyes, dear old Pont, and after mother died, not right away, but after a while, he loved me just as he had loved her.

That night, when father sat smoking his pipe under the cherry tree, I picked up heart to say:

"Father, I am thinking about going away to look for work."

II.

I had nothing to do beside cry when I shut myself into my little bedroom. First, I tried on father's best pantaloons. He had never worn them since mother's funeral and had forgotten he had anything but his old velveteens. They were a pretty good fit, and so were his boots. I would have to make a blouse of an old flannel dress of mother's, a blue plaid, and hating to cut into that, and wondering what she would say about my venture, hindered me a good while. Well, it was 2 o'clock in the morning when I dressed in my new suit and tried to see myself in my bit of a looking-glass. I started back half frightened, such a big boy I looked to be. I had cut off my hair. That was a dreadfully hard thing to do, but if I had stopped at that I would have had to give up going. If you will believe it, father never noticed my red eyes in the morning, nor my short hair, but then I kept on my sun bonnet.

It was a tough long pull on a hot day from our house to "The Point," but I made it before noon. I put into a narrow ravine about a half mile on the river side from Jerry Clark's grandmother's, and ate my bread and cold flapjacks sitting in my boat. There I hid Dancing Polly well under the flags; nobody would have dreamed the boat was there. I cut a stick and swung my little bundle over my shoulder, showered myself with road dust and struck off down the road with a long, swinging gait. My greatest fear was that I should forget to be as deaf and stupid as I had decided to be, so, if you will believe it, I scratched the back of my right hand with a thorn—no little scratch either—to tell me of my fears.

A few rods from the lonely cabin a log lay by the foot-path. There I sat down, knowing that somebody would be watching me. I pretended to fall into a doze, but through the meshes of my hat I saw the big, bouncing girl come to the door several times and watch me close. She tried sawing wood, but the saw got fast. Then she began picking up chips, watching me all the time.

The big girl came out, when I got up and went away. She had two water buckets, and she halted at the top of the path down the bank.

I jogged on, as if not seeing her. "Hey, there!" she called after me, but I was too deaf to hear. "Hey, there! Say! Are you looking for work?"

I was half a mind to give up the deafness and hear her, but I slowly trudged on.

"Hey, there!" she shouted again, with no girl's voice, sending a stone after me which struck my hat. I turned round and stood stock still in the path. As she came up to me I motioned that I was hard of hearing. So she shouted in a loud voice close to my ear:

"Are you looking for work?"

I said I was, ducking my head for a bow, and that for all I was hard of hearing, I could do as good work as anybody. I had been cook for lumbermen, and was hoping to get better wages up in Saginaw.

"Saginaw!" with an oath. It is good to be deaf sometimes. Such an odd-looking creature she was, but not much, if any, taller than Peggy Herrick. She had short bristling hair, very much oiled, but still it would not stay parted in the middle; a rough, blotched skin, laughing brown eyes, that made me less afraid of her than I would have been—eyes you can trust, somehow. Her chin was square and heavy—well enough for a man—and when she walked her skirts seemed to trouble her a good deal.

She told me just what I knew she would. Her grandmother was very sick, nigh unto death. She must have somebody to help her—somebody who could be useful in every way. She would rather have a man-servant—for she sometimes had to send by skiff across the river or over to Buffalo. Could I row? Then I was just the help she wanted, and she offered me good wages, and pay in advance.

"I'll do my best to please you ma'am, and in a little while you won't mind my being so deaf."

I followed her back to the shanty, my heart beating fast enough. She made me understand that the old lady would be distressed to see the face of a stranger. I must keep in the little kitchen. I began work at once by taking the two buckets and going down to the lake for water. There was a strange silence in the cabin, and somebody was smoking cigars.

III.

"Miss Nancy" was the name of my mistress, and she called me Trumps.

I got a wonderfully big supper that night considering nobody was supposed to want any but Miss Nancy and me. There was a bean soup, a broiled steak, black coffee, the leavings of a game pie and bananas. The old lady had her "death hunger," Miss Nancy said, but I was so deaf she gave up trying to make me understand all about it. When she had shut the door behind her, and slipped the bolt, I heard her say:

"That's the biggest piece of luck we poor devils ever had. Zounds! if we don't save ourselves to-night we may as well give up."

"I must die to-night, sure!"—the same wheezing voice I heard on Navy Island.

"Say, Hank, why not send this dolt over with my coffin?"

"That's just what we will do, boys. What lucky dogs we are, after all. Catching him will be another thing from catching one of us."

"It's running a great risk," said somebody, hardly above a whisper; a cold disagreeable voice. "If this thing goes up we are ruined. Capt. Bedell is on our track. Jerry heard some of his passengers talking about it to-day. They think we make the run from Grand Island to Touawanda—that we have a canal boat or a lumber sloop in the business. The captain doesn't suspect Jerry. Asked him about his grandmother the other day. It seems there is a good deal of interest in the old lady."

I was called shortly after to bring hot water, and had stumbled through the door quite into the grandmother's presence before Miss Nancy could check me. I only saw a coffin standing upon a table near an untidy bed—not a large coffin, but it was empty and open, and the sight shocked me so I gave a little scream, and so lost seeing anything more. Miss Nancy laughed when she had followed me out into the kitchen, and said the old lady was very queer; she had had that coffin by her bed for more than a fortnight. Then she went on to say that a message had come from Jerry. He was sick at Black Rock. If his grandmother should die that night they were to send her remains directly to him. Somebody would be waiting for them not far from the house where he was. She was glad I was a boatman. I would have to take the body over before morning, no doubt. She would follow in another boat with Father O'Leary, if he could be made to go at all.

"Why not wait for the daylight?" I asked. "Then we might miss Jerry. He gives the orders. We must do as he says."

I went up to my loft where my bed was, but with no idea of going to sleep. I did not undress. I threw myself down on the bed, and that was all I knew until I was awakened by Miss Nancy about midnight. The grandmother was dead, she said, and in her coffin. She would have to stay at home, and I must make the trip alone.

I moved about as in a horrible dream, talking to myself in my thoughts, and then only saying something like: "Stick to it, Peggy. Don't give up. You are almost through. Nothing will hurt you; and by to-morrow—only to-morrow—you will be a very rich girl, Peggy; well paid for this night's work. Keep up, Peggy, keep up."

That was a very heavy coffin Miss Nancy and I carried down the bank in the black night, considering the size of it and the weight of most old women. But I said nothing—only to Peggy Herrick. The boat sank almost to the water's level when I got in. My orders were to steer for Buffalo light until I was half a mile or more from port. Then I was to put in to a light that I would see in a high building to the north about a half mile—between a poplar tree and a church steeple. The light would be in the third story, and Jerry or somebody else at the dock. My oars were muffled—I knew that at the first stroke—and silent as death my boat pushed out, Buffalo light gleaming faintly over the black waters.

"Now, Peggy, cut for home," I said aloud, when I was well out from the point, and looking over my shoulder for the necessary bearings. I knew every tree-top dimly outlined in the distance against the sky. In two hours at most I would be home, for the current would help me. Should they follow, we would have a race with our oars, that was all. But how could they see my course in that darkness? The clouds were breaking; but it would take better eyes than mine even to see such a black shape as my boat and its cargo pushing through the dark.

I was perhaps a mile from home. A strange joy had given place to my fears. I was thinking how surprised mother would be, and how many dollars the poor old grandmother would be worth, when my right oar creaked horribly under my excited pull. Another stroke, and it broke at the oarlock. Good heavens! and I was not dreaming! It was not all a nightmare! My oar was broken! I had no other! My boat was gliding into the main current of the river, the Niagara River, and the falls not fifteen miles below!

What did I do? What could I do but sit frozen in terror, helpless and dumb! On, on, on I was steadily floating. The night shutting me in; nobody to hear, nobody to help; the distance between me and the bank of the Grand Island growing wider and wider; that black, cruel current, the very gulf of death. No, I did not pray, unless the wild, shrill cry I gave when I saw the roof of our house against the sky was a prayer. I had thrown off my wrappings to make the desperate plunge that would only bring death the sooner, and save me from that hurrying dash through the rapids ahead, when I gave a loud, despairing cry—a shriek so terrible that I could not have repeated it but for the quick answer it brought. Old Pont answered me.

Out from the darkness and across the dreadful river came his loud wolf-like bay—a furious cry for help. Yes, it was more than that—it promised to save me; it told me to be brave.

I answered him; called him by name. Louder and louder did he bark and howl as he threw himself against the door and tore at it with his paws. If the door of heaven ever opens to me the light will be like what I saw when father's candle flickered over old Pont's head. He caught my cry; my boat had passed the house, and waiting for nothing he ran down the bank. I could hear the clanking of the anchor, and Pont struggling to get into the boat.