













## Poetry.

### A WOMAN'S CURIOSITY.

I wonder who those people are  
That live across the way?  
I wonder what their business is,  
And how they pass each day?

I wonder who she is that lives  
Upon the upper floor,  
And if these children both are hers,  
If she be rich or poor?

And who is she who always wears  
That deep-dyed crimson skirt,  
Whose face so pale as marble gleams,  
Heath hair of raven black?

And who is he with whitened locks,  
And who is the maiden fair,  
With roses in her rosy cheeks  
And sunlight in her hair?

I wonder if I always will  
Go wondering on this way,  
Or shall I get acquainted  
And know them all some day?

Know who they are, and what they have,  
And how they came to be,  
The tenants of the house that stands  
Right opposite to me?

And why—but there, I must arrange  
Inside that house to see,  
Oh, I shall die! I know I shall!  
Of curiosity.

## Literature.

### The Longest Night in Life.

It was one of those old-fashioned winters in the days of the Georges, when the snow lay on the ground for weeks, when railways were unknown, and the electric telegraph had not been dreamed of save by the speculative Countess of London. The mails had been irregular for a month past, and the letter-bags which did reach the post-office had been brought forth with difficulty. The newspapers were devoid of all foreign intelligence, the metropolis knew nothing of the doings of the province, and the provinces knew little more of the affairs of the metropolis; but the columns of both were crowded with accounts from the indomitable of the weather, with heart-rending accounts of starvation and destitution, with wonderful escapes of adventurous travellers, and of still more adventurous mail-coaches and guards. Business was almost at a standstill, or was only carried on by fits and starts; families were made uneasy by the frequent long silence of their absent members, and the poor were suffering great misery from cold and famine.

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So she kept to her purpose, and early in February took her seat in the mail for London, being the only passenger (who was booked for the whole journey).

The thaw had continued for some days; the roads though heavy were open; and with the aid of extra horses here and there the first half of the journey was performed pretty easily though tediously.

The second day was more trying than the first; the wind blew keenly, and penetrated every crevice of the coach; the partial thaw had but slightly affected the wild moorland they had to cross; thick heavy clouds were gathering round the red raffles; and when on reaching a little roadside inn the snow began to fall fast, both the coachman and the driver urged their solitary passenger to remain there for the night, instead of tempting the perils of the next stage. Miss Stirling hesitated for a moment, but the little inn looked by no means a pleasant place to be snowed up in, so she resolutely refused, and, gathering her furs more closely round her, she stepped bravely into the frosty air of the coach. Thus, for a time she lost all consciousness of outward things in sleep.

A sudden lurch awoke her, and she soon learned that they had stuck fast in a snowdrift, and that no efforts of the tired horses, could extricate the coach from its unpleasant predicament. The guard mounting one of the leaders, set off in search of assistance, while the coachman comforted Miss Stirling by telling her that as nearly as they could calculate they were only a mile or two from the square's, and that if the guard could find his way to the square's the square was certain to come to their rescue with his sleds. It was not the first time that the square had got the mailbags out of a snow-drift by that means.

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"Ay, ay, Mary," said her host, addressing his wife. "I told you that the sleigh would have plenty of work this winter, and you see I was right."

"As you always are, uncle," a merry voice exclaimed. "We all say at Hawtree that Uncle Atherton never can do a thing wrong." "Atherton! Hawtree!" repeated Miss Stirling in some amazement, "and uttered in that familiar voice! Ellen, Ellen Middleton, is it possible that you are here?"

A joyful exclamation and a rush into her arms were the young girls ready reply to this question as she cried, Uncle Atherton, Aunt Mary, don't you know your old friend Miss Stirling?"

Mrs. Atherton fixed her soft blue eyes on the stranger, in whom she could at first scarcely recognize the bright-haired girl whom she had not seen for eighteen or twenty years; but by and by, the satisfied smile that, though changed, she was Ellen Stirling still, with the same sunny smile and the same laughing eyes that had made every one love her in their school days. Heartfelt indeed were the greetings which followed, and cordial the welcome Mrs. Atherton gave her old friend as she congratulated her on having been able to reach her own roof: more especially as she owed this good fortune to Mr. Atherton's exertions in rescuing her.

"It is the merest chance, too, that he is at home at present," she said; he ought to have been in Scotland, but the state of the roads in this bleak country has kept him prisoner here for weeks."

"And the others as well," Ellen Middleton added; but both children and grown people are only too thankful to have so good an excuse for staying longer at Belfield." And then, laughing, she asked Aunt Mary how she meant to dispose of Miss Stirling for the night, for the house was as full already as it could hold.

"Oh," said her aunt, "we shall manage very well. Belfield is very elastic." She smiled as she spoke; but it struck Miss Stirling that the question was, nevertheless, a puzzling one, as she took the first opportunity of entreating her to take no trouble on her account; a chair by the fire was really all the accommodation she cared for, as she wished to be in readiness to pursue her journey as soon as the coach could proceed.

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"Oh! if that be all, I am quite willing to become its first lady tenant," said Miss Stirling heartily. So the matter was settled, and orders were given to prepare the Pavilion for the unexpected guest.

The evening passed pleasantly; music, dancing, and ghost stories made the hours fly fast. It was long past ten—the usual hour for retiring at Belfield—when Miss Stirling under her hostess's guidance, took possession of her outdoor chamber. It really was a pleasant cheerful little apartment. The crimson hangings of the bed and window looked warm and comfortable in the flashing firelight; and when the weather, with heart-rending accounts of starvation and destitution, with wonderful escapes of adventurous travellers, and of still more adventurous mail-coaches and guards. Business was almost at a standstill, or was only carried on by fits and starts; families were made uneasy by the frequent long silence of their absent members, and the poor were suffering great misery from cold and famine.

The south road had been blocked up for nearly a month, when a partial thaw almost caused a public rejoicing; coaches began to run, letters to be dispatched and delivered, and weather-bound travellers to have some hope of reaching their destination. Among the first ladies who undertook the journey from the west of Scotland to London at this time, was a certain Miss Stirling, who had, for weeks past, desired to reach the metropolis. Her friends assured her that it was a foolhardy attempt and told her of travellers who had been twice, by three times, snowed up on their way to town, but their advice and warnings were of no avail. Miss Stirling's business was urgent, it concerned others more than herself, and she was not one to be deterred by personal discomfort or by physical difficulties from doing what she thought was right.

So she kept to her purpose, and early in February took her seat in the mail for London, being the only passenger (who was booked for the whole journey).

The thaw had continued for some days; the roads though heavy were open; and with the aid of extra horses here and there the first half of the journey was performed pretty easily though tediously.

The second day was more trying than the first; the wind blew keenly, and penetrated every crevice of the coach; the partial thaw had but slightly affected the wild moorland they had to cross; thick heavy clouds were gathering round the red raffles; and when on reaching a little roadside inn the snow began to fall fast, both the coachman and the driver urged their solitary passenger to remain there for the night, instead of tempting the perils of the next stage. Miss Stirling hesitated for a moment, but the little inn looked by no means a pleasant place to be snowed up in, so she resolutely refused, and, gathering her furs more closely round her, she stepped bravely into the frosty air of the coach. Thus, for a time she lost all consciousness of outward things in sleep.

A sudden lurch awoke her, and she soon learned that they had stuck fast in a snowdrift, and that no efforts of the tired horses, could extricate the coach from its unpleasant predicament. The guard mounting one of the leaders, set off in search of assistance, while the coachman comforted Miss Stirling by telling her that as nearly as they could calculate they were only a mile or two from the square's, and that if the guard could find his way to the square's the square was certain to come to their rescue with his sleds. It was not the first time that the square had got the mailbags out of a snow-drift by that means.

The coachman's expectations were fulfilled. Within an hour, the distant tinkling of the sled bells was heard, and lights were seen gleaming afar; they rapidly advanced nearer and nearer; and soon a heavy voice was heard halting them. A party of men with lanterns and shovels came to their assistance; a strong arm lifted Miss Stirling from the coach, and supported her trembling steps to a sled close at hand; and almost before she knew where she was, she found herself in a hall brilliantly lighted by a blazing wood fire. Numbers of rosy glowing children faces were gathered round her, numbers of bright eager eyes were gazing curiously upon her, kindly hands were busied in removing her wraps, and pleasant voices welcomed her and congratulated her on her escape.

"Ay, ay, Mary," said her host, addressing his wife. "I told you that the sleigh would have plenty of work this winter, and you see I was right."

"As you always are, uncle," a merry voice exclaimed. "We all say at Hawtree that Uncle Atherton never can do a thing wrong." "Atherton! Hawtree!" repeated Miss Stirling in some amazement, "and uttered in that familiar voice! Ellen, Ellen Middleton, is it possible that you are here?"

A joyful exclamation and a rush into her arms were the young girls ready reply to this question as she cried, Uncle Atherton, Aunt Mary, don't you know your old friend Miss Stirling?"

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